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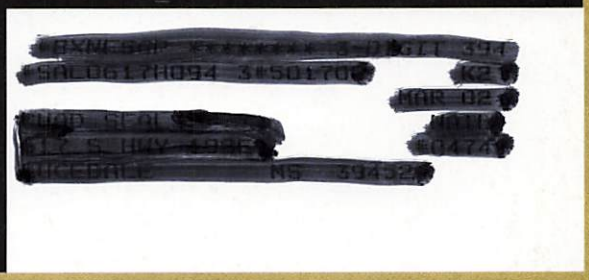

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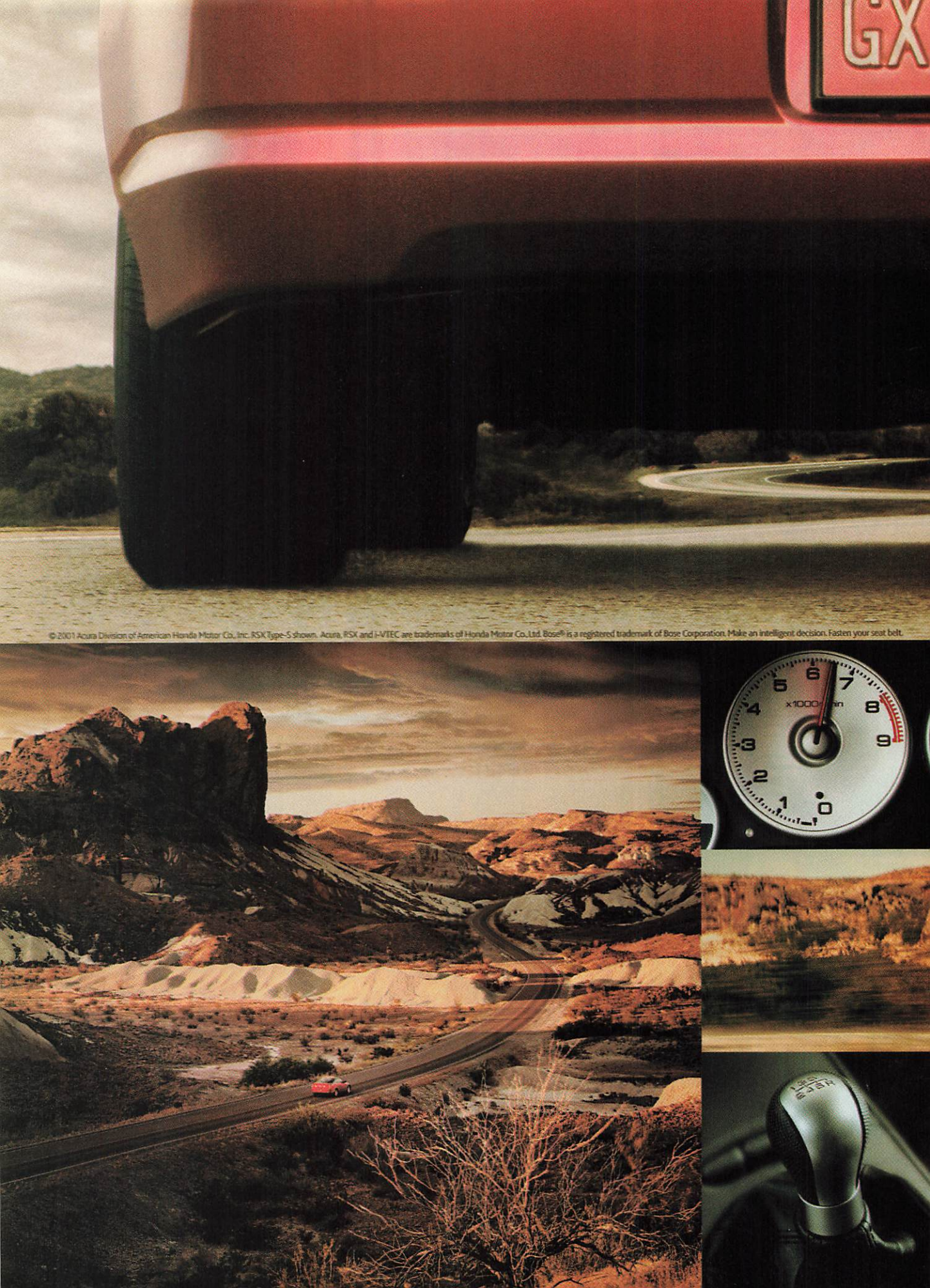

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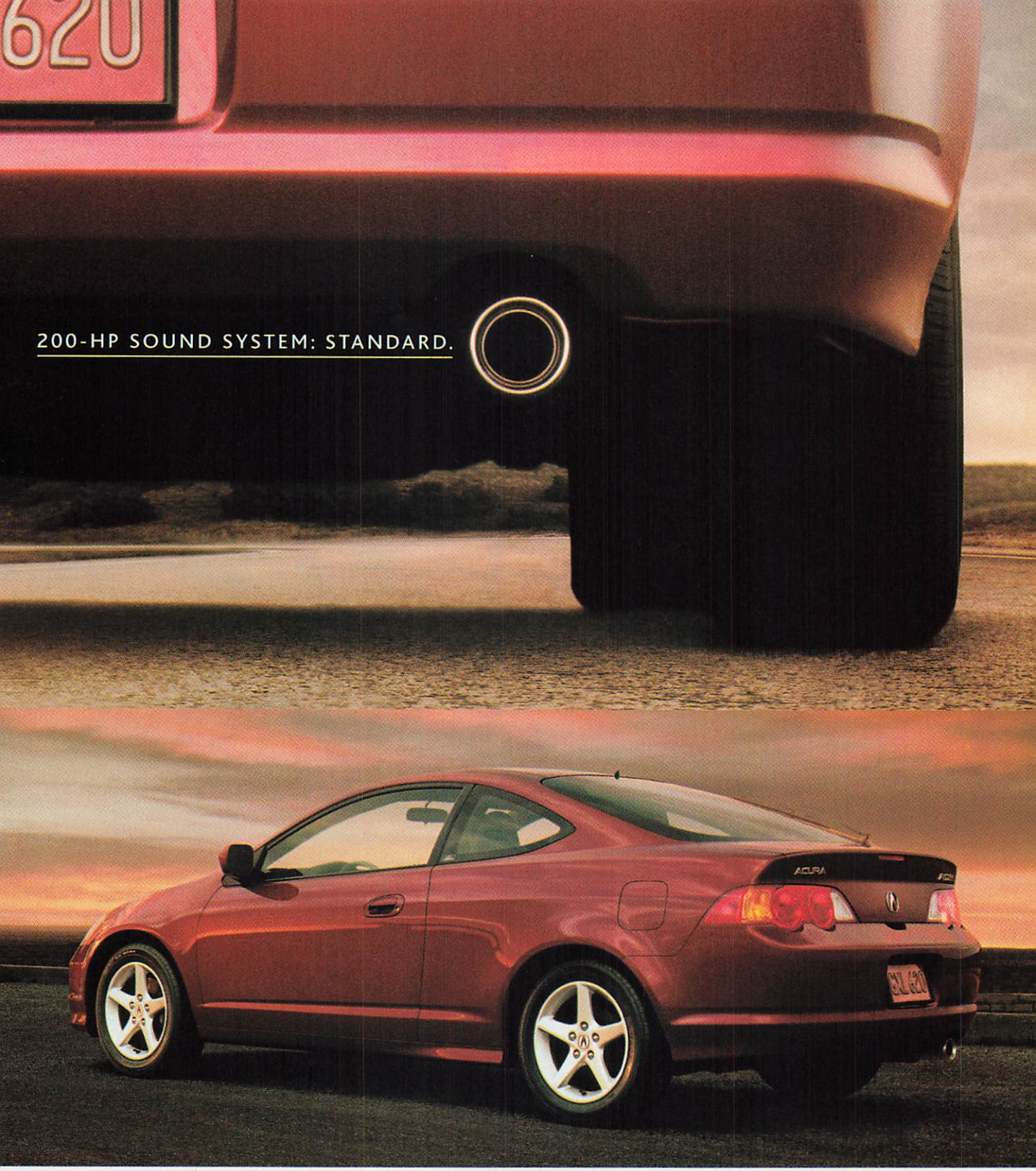

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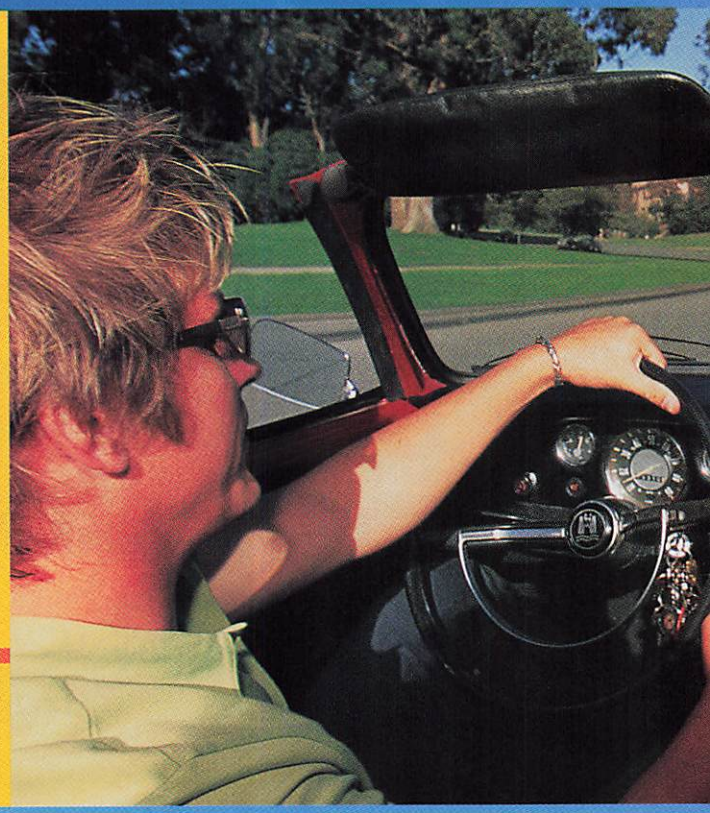

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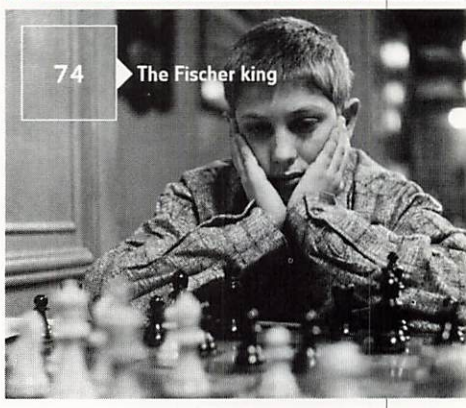
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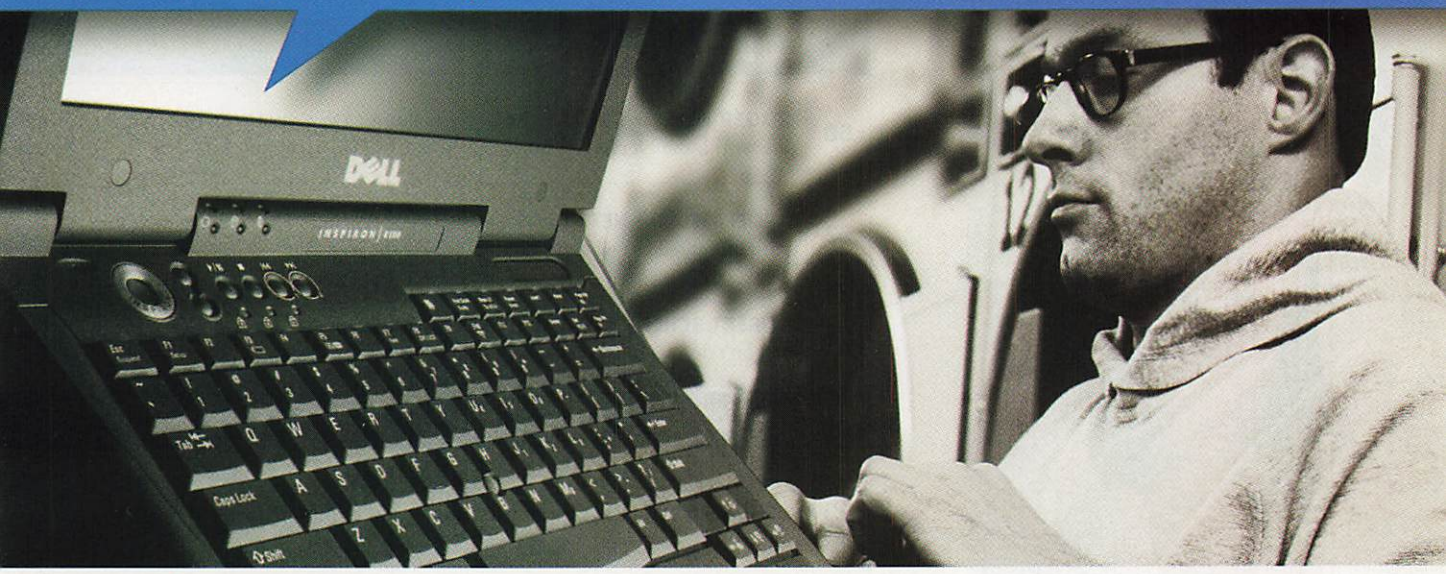

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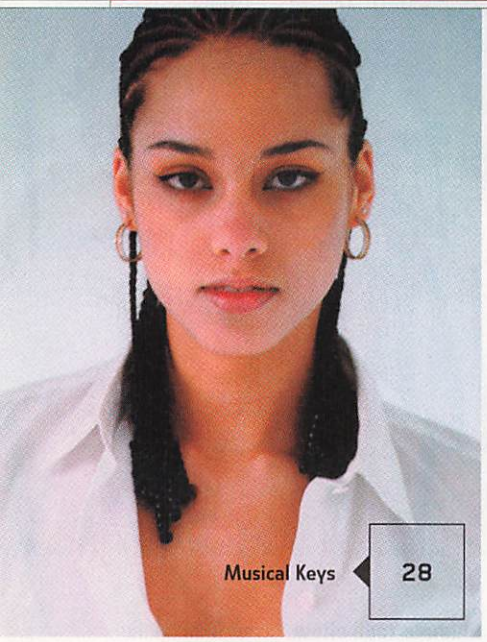

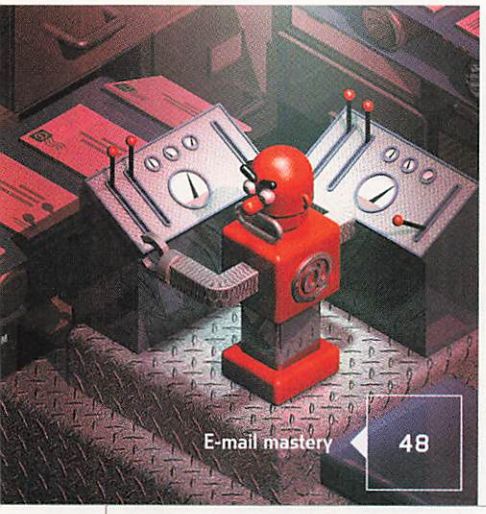

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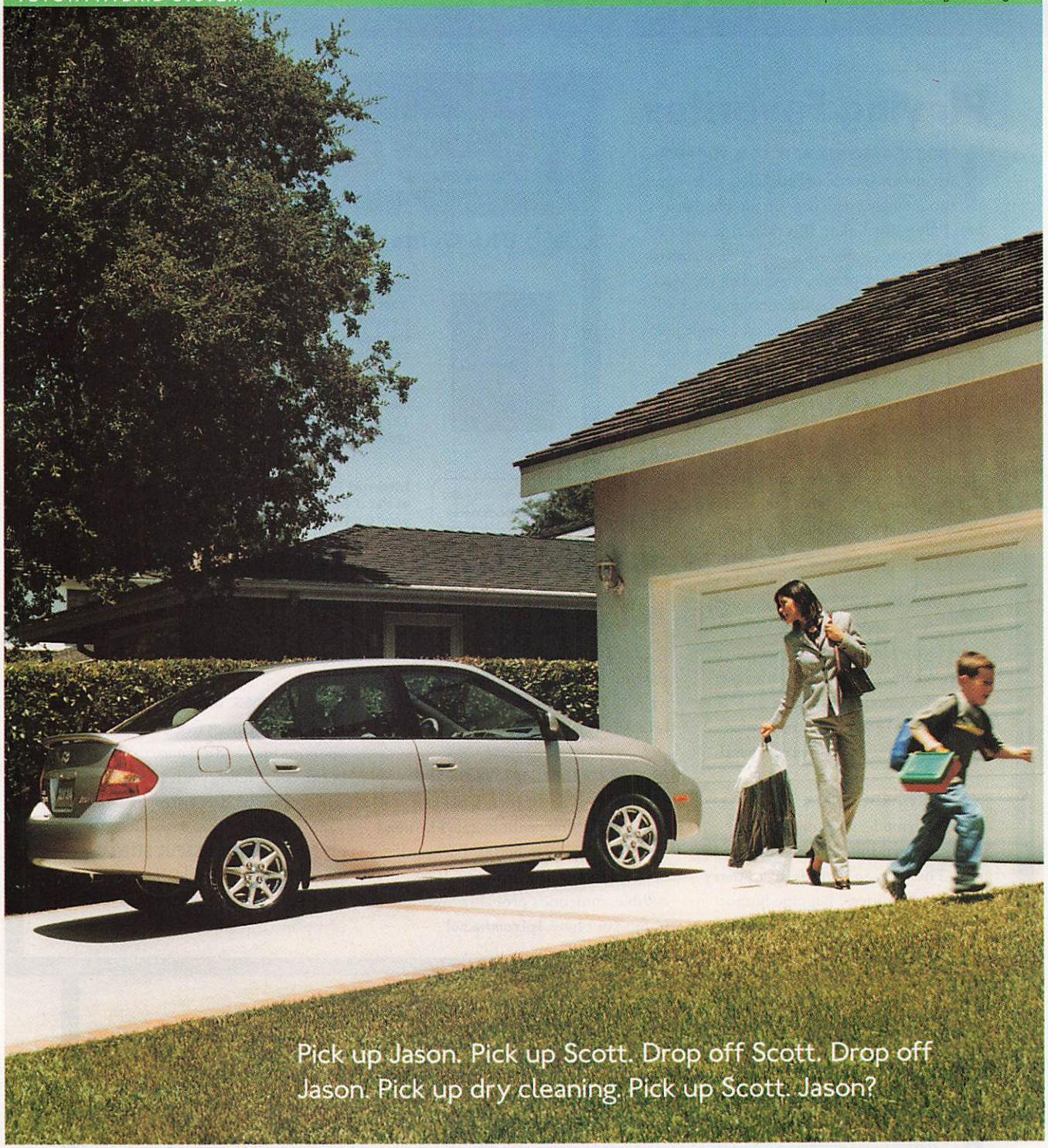

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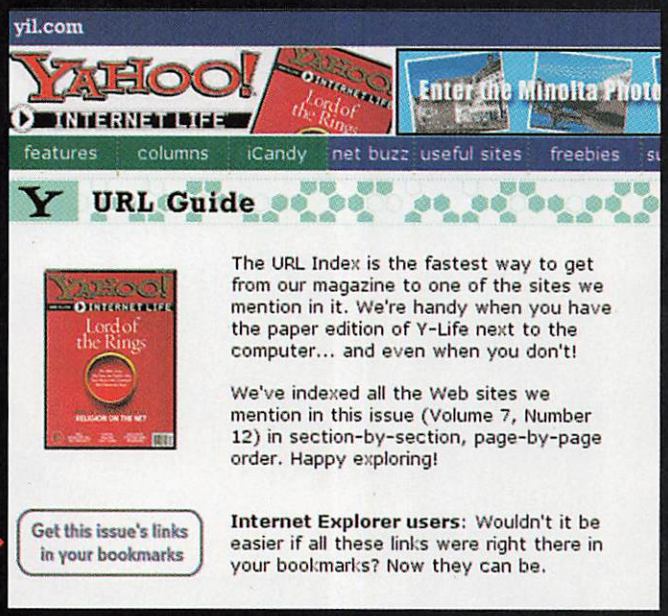

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Checking It Twice

The Net—much like the Dude in *The Big Lebowski*—abides. It's been a rough year (see pages 56–67), but the Internet is still thriving, and we're here to help you through it with such guides as our "100 Best Sites for 2002" (page 79). Speaking of lists, we've gathered our favorites at **yil.com/lists**. But wait, there's more: In print you got "50 Most Incredibly Useful Sites"; the Web site hosts 101 of 'em. The magazine brought you "America's 100 Most Wired Colleges"; the Web site has 200 wired colleges as well as listings for smaller schools and two-year institutions—you get the idea: bonus content galore. Some of the gems you may have missed include the "10 Radio Stations No Browser Should Be Without" (have *you* been listening to Houston's KPFT?), the "15 Worst Net Events" (Carnie Wilson's stomach-surgery Webcast—gastrilicious!), or our most wired small towns (we're talking to you, Glasgow, Montana). Finally, if you long for the simpler Festivus of a carefree bygone era, you can wax nostalgic with our list of "100 Best Sites for 2001." (*Sigh.*)

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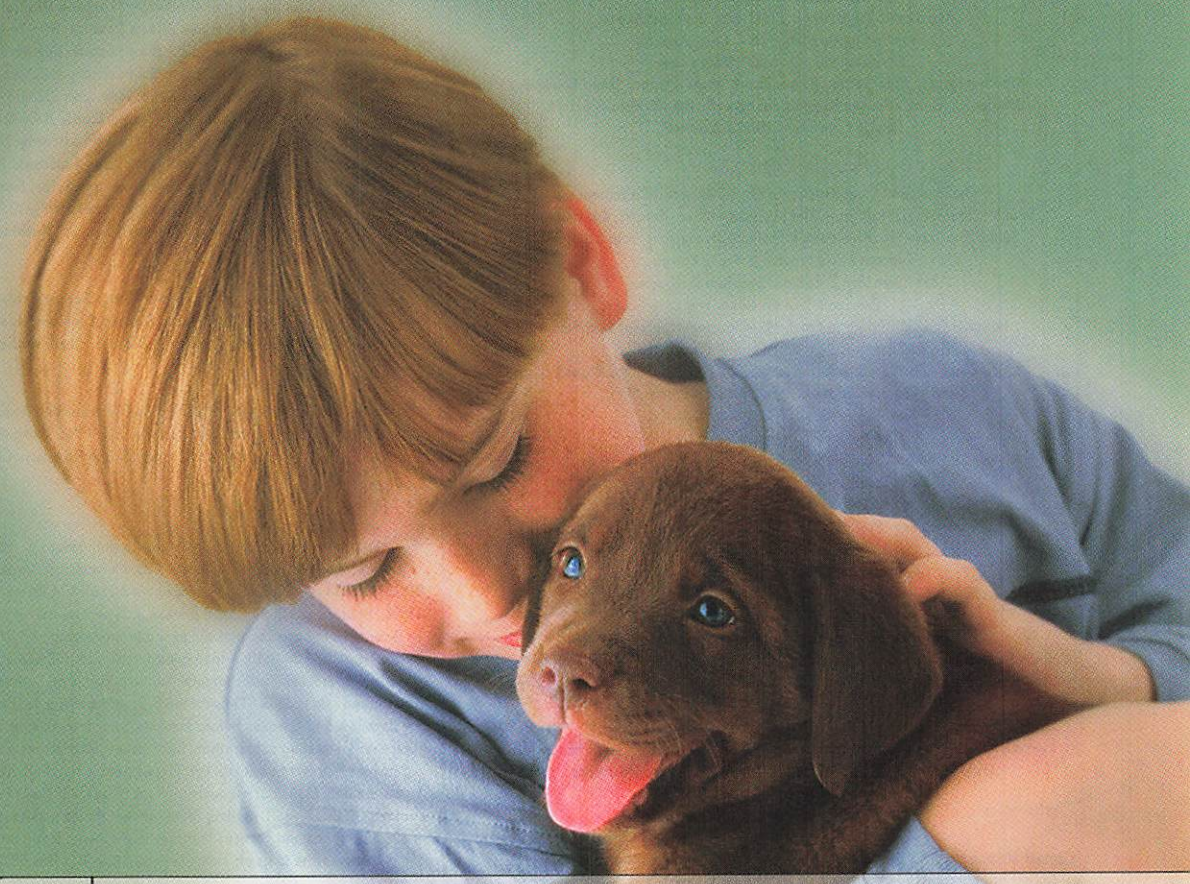

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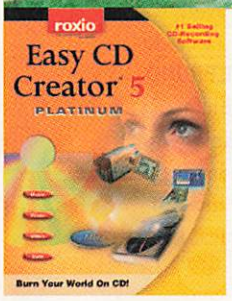

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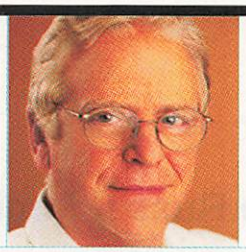

The Net in a Time of Crisis

WELCOME TO THIS YEAR'S TWO-FOR-ONE ISSUE, IN which we look back at 2001 with our "Top of the Net" selections and look ahead to 2002 with our "100 Best Sites." Know what? Between the two years, if we had to vote for a favorite we'd take our chances on '02. The other guy pretty much wore us down.

As I was growing up, two dates always loomed in my imagination: 1984, with its implications of Orwellian conformity, permanent war, and Big Brother; and 2001, with its promise of Kubrickian technology, prosperity, and transforming discovery. Now that both dates have come and gone, something curious strikes me: It happened exactly the other way around. In the '80s the pendulum swung toward personal freedom, while a surge of innovative technology gave us a time of relative peace, prosperity—and greed. Meanwhile, the unforgettable 2001 snapped our prosperity streak, forced some hard questions about technology, and gave us a whiff of Big Brother with an open-ended war on terrorism—and maybe our privacy.

Whatever else happened in 2001, you went online in increased numbers for the same serious and silly reasons you always have

But people will be people, and whatever else happened in 2001, you went online in increased numbers for the same serious and silly reasons you always have. Yes, you still searched the Web for the barely legal Britney Spears and for barely legal music. Yes, you still IM'd your pals, outbid each other for that tchotchke on eBay, and e-mailed around the dumbest jokes, many of them now Flash animated. (See? Technology marches on.) But, as we chronicled in our "9.11" issue, you also reached out to one another in unprecedented ways to deal with a changed world. That's why our Person of the Year is...well, turn to the feature on page 56 and find out.

Looking ahead to what *has* to be a better year, we've also compiled our annual list of lists—the 100 sites we think do it best of all. Under the sharp eye of senior editor **CREE McCREE**, contributing writer **ALAN COHEN** gathered our choices, taking into account many, many readers' nominations and much, much kibitzing by our staff. We take this list seriously because the winning sites take it seriously, carrying it as their ultimate citation for the coming year.

Then to cleanse your palate, turn to "On the Internet, Nobody Knows If You're Bobby Fischer," an investigation of a news item that caught our eye: At least one chess grandmaster is sure that an anonymous online player was actually the mysterious, reclusive—and, to judge from reports, thoroughly twisted—chess legend. Is he or isn't he? Freelance writer **BRAD WIENERS**, a longtime *Wired* staffer, may not know for sure, but he tells a wonderful tale that's more than just a virtual chase for the chess prodigy—it's an exploration of how identity works in the Information Age.

As I said, this is the issue in which we click both back and forward. (Well, we *are* our readers' browsers, so to speak.) A lot of the credit this month goes to departments editor **RON BEL BRUNO**, doing his fifth end-of-year stint, with an able assist from senior editor **BILGE EBIRI**. Much of what we saw delighted us, some of it appalled us, and we're happy to tell you which was which. Tough times can be interesting times, and they always lead to better times. Let's click a Champagne glass to that.

X Barry Golson

BARRY GOLSON, EDITOR IN CHIEF

JAY GULLIXSON

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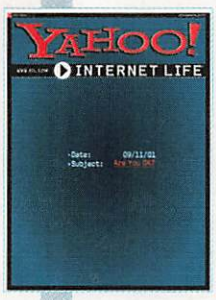

DEEP COVER

When I saw your November issue, it took my breath away. The day the tragedy occurred I received an e-mail with the same words: "Are you OK?" It was from a former high school classmate. Then came another—my sister this time. We seldom talk, but she had been crying when she heard the news. Another e-mail: an acquaintance from a message board I frequent. Suddenly, the world got very small and comforting. Strangers online, when they found out I was from New York, sent me electronic cards of caring and cheer. "Are you OK?" I'm doing much better, thanks to those small three words.

MARIAN PAPPACENO
@worldnet.att.net

The November '01 cover was incredible. When my copy arrived, I picked up the magazine and stared at those words for a few minutes. As a student at a small college in the middle of nowhere in Colorado, I haven't been closely affected by this tragedy. However, when I saw the simple words "Are you OK?" on your cover, something inside me was deeply moved. Thanks for a great article, too.

CARL SUNDERMANN
@yahoo.com

I found the November cover of *Y-Life* one of the most stunning and evocative graphics I've ever seen in the print medium. Kudos to the person(s) who came up with that wonderful concept.

JOHN E. FOOTE
@citcom.net

I pore through about seven newspapers—and just as many online—every day. Add to that about 30 different magazines each month. Consequently, I rarely get worked up about any publication. Until now. The connected themes of how the Internet affected the events of September 11, how the Net might change as a result of the carnage that Tuesday, and how technology might be used to prevent similar catastrophes were all timely, nonexploitative, and hugely fascinating. Congratulations to all.

ROGER KETTYLS
@self-counsel.com

FEAR FACTOR

"The Terrorists & the Net" [November '01, page 86] notes that terrorist organizations are using advanced encryption technology and the power of the Internet to send secret messages to one another. What shocks me is that they could download top-of-the-line encryption programs for free, and that those programs could be found right in our own "cyber" yard.

PAUL VOIGT
@aol.com

THE FAL-GUY

Angela Gunn [Net Ethics, November '01, page 62] writes: "The difference between Falwell and the terrorists? Not religious extremism, not the desire to legislate morality, not hateful intent. Only degree."

Wrong! While Rev. Falwell made a serious error in judgment (linking the attacks of September 11 to our nation's turning from God), to his credit, he made a prompt and thorough apology. Osama bin Laden has not only failed to apologize for the attacks but has subsequently released video footage praising the hijackers and continues to call for an Islamic holy war against the U.S.A.

For Gunn to draw parallels between Falwell and bin Laden is horrific—even more so than Falwell's misspoken words. I find Gunn's comments far more hateful than anything Falwell has said. Perhaps she should take a good, long look in the mirror before equating Falwell and bin Laden.

GLENN PRICE
@hotmail.com

Angela Gunn responds: Sorry, Glenn, but that wasn't some momentary "misspeak"—Falwell wasn't just blithering along and out popped some tiny Freudian slip. He said it, he expanded on it, and until CNN et al. brought down a firestorm of public opinion, he stood by it, at which point he claims he didn't do it ("I would never blame any human being except the terrorists").

I've yet to read any amendment to the New Testament in which Falwell's given a bye on those well-known qualifications for casting the first stone. He's an irresponsible hate-monger, and I pray for the spiritual well-being of anyone who turns from the Bible's message of humility and love to listen to his wicked, callous demagoguery. In other words, I stand by what I said—no regrets whatsoever. Thanks for writing.

JUDGING JERRY

With regard to Angela Gunn's comments on Jerry Falwell in your November issue, she hit the nail on the head. She put into words exactly how I feel about his comments. How dare he! I work about eight blocks from what was the WTC. What I have seen here since September 11 is people doing everything they can to help each other and behaving in a truly godly way. We don't need Falwell to tell us how to do that. He's just kicking us when we're down.

A LIBERAL, FEMINIST, PRO-CHOICE NEW YORKER
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RELOAD: Riedel Crystal decanters [December '01, page 121] are available at www.winebasics.com.

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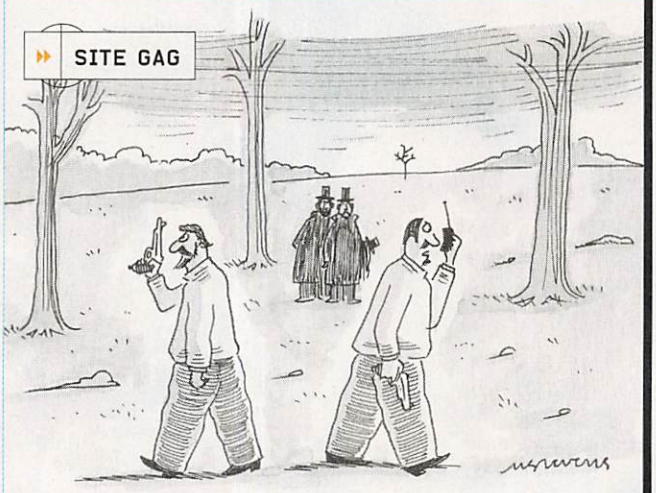

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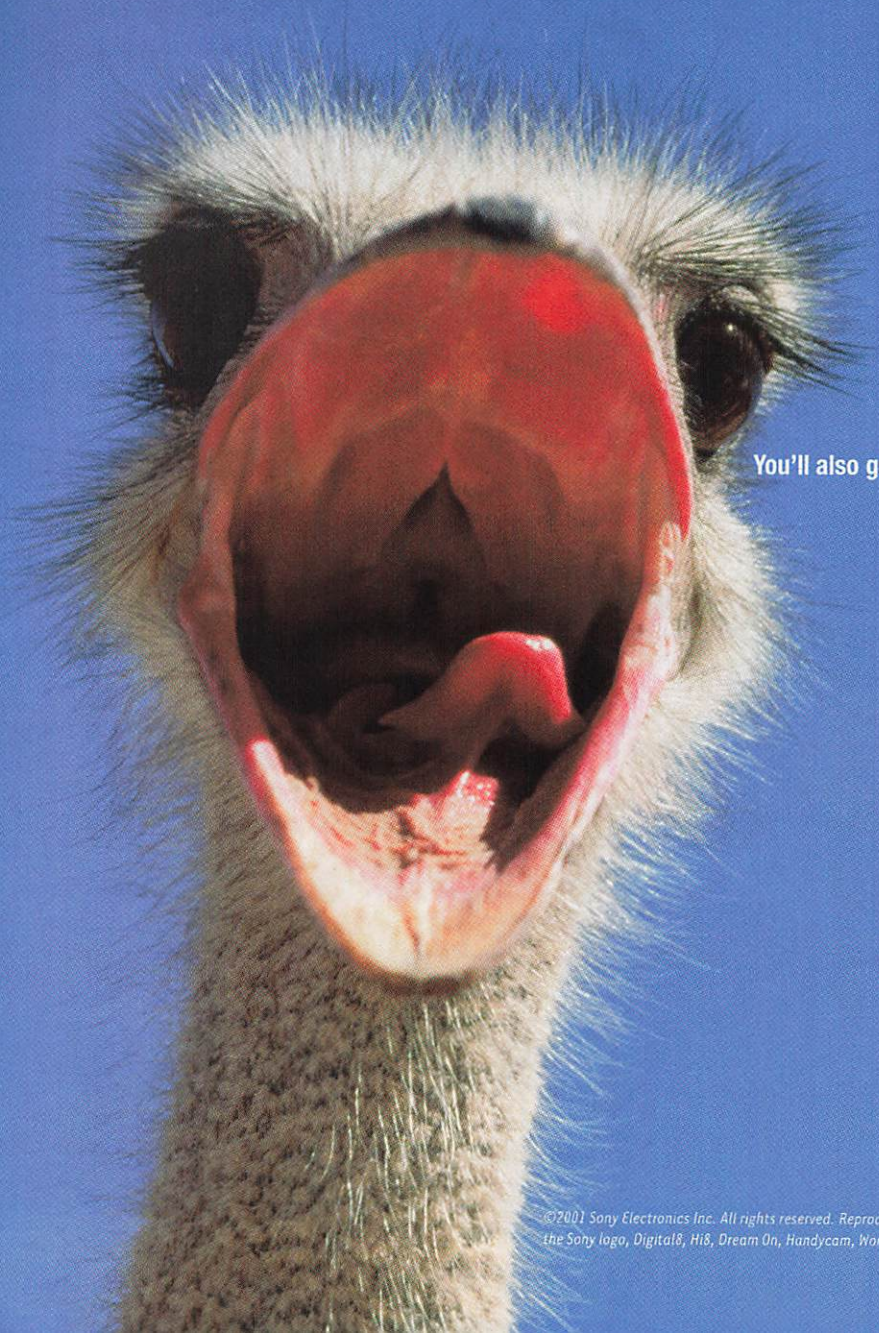

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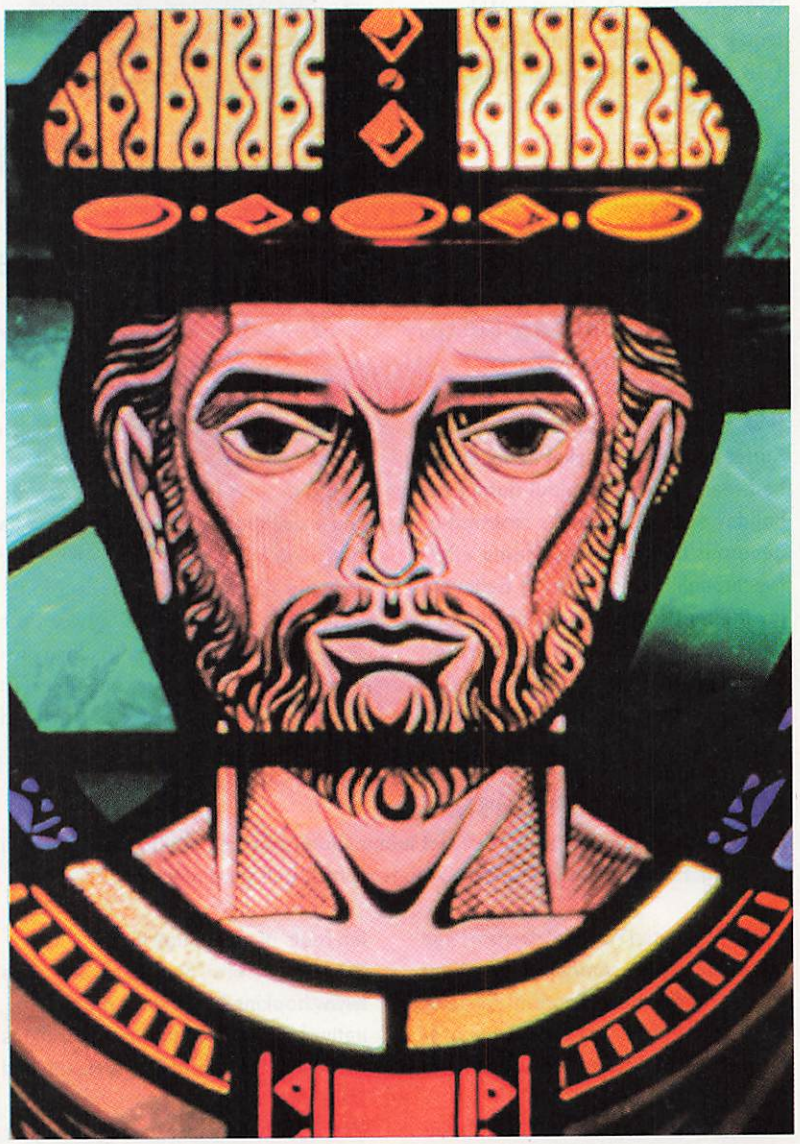
People, Places, and Trends on the Net >>> Edited by Ron Bel Bruno

JANUARY 2002

A SAINT FOR ALL SURFERS



Before television and the yellow pages, and even before the Renaissance delivered us into civilization, there was *Etymologies,* the first encyclopedia of universal knowledge—in effect, the Internet of its day. So impressive was this magnum opus, written by Isidore, archbishop of Seville (560-636), that its author was canonized. Fast-forward to 1999: The revered cleric is floated as the possible patron saint of the Internet. But actually securing such a lofty title can be tough. Rumors fly. Tongues wag. You need papal support, and that takes time.

When the Holy See announced in November that the theme of this year's World Communications Day will be "Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel," Isidore's chances improved. The Church still won't discuss his wired status. But it's quite possible that when Pope John Paul II starts a surfing session, he recites the "Prayer for Before Logging On to the Internet" found at **Catholic Online [catholic.org/isidore/prayer.html]**, which humbly requests "the intercession of Saint Isidore, bishop and doctor, during our journeys through the Internet." The Vatican's IT team must be relieved. **MEAGHAN O'NEILL**

IMAGE OF SAINT ISIDORE: WINDOW OF ST. MATTHEW CHURCH, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA/COURTESY OF CNS/THE CROSIERS

32 RING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH LESS CLUTTER AND MORE CASH: HERE'S THE SCOOP ON FOUR HANDY **SITES FOR UNLOADING STASH**

34 GET THE SNOW-DAY STORY, FIND A RIDE, OR **READ HEADLINES** FROM AROUND THE GLOBE. CHECK OUT OUR INCREDIBLY USEFUL SITES

38 MAKING RESOLUTIONS OR **TRACKING DOWN HEALTH INSURANCE?** YOU HAVE A CHOICE: THE AULD LANG SYNE OR THE NEW, NET WAY

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Net Briefs

SUITABLE FOR ALL AUDIENCES? AOL, MSN, and Yahoo! join the effort to rate Web content.

JUDGMENT DAY

Is your favorite Yahoo! or MSN group unsuitable for minors? You may find out soon. AOL, MSN, and Yahoo! have all agreed to abide by the Internet Content Rating Association's voluntary Web content-rating system. The industry-based ICRA developed the system to classify sites based on violent or sexual themes, explicit language, and depiction of alcohol and drug use. The Big Three have agreed to rate their sites and subsites accordingly, with the hope that sites from other sources will follow suit. Parents can customize their Netscape or Explorer browsers to filter out content based on any set of ICRA criteria.

NO NEW TAXES—REALLY

Surfers buying big-ticket items online had reason to be thankful during the holiday season: Congress renewed its generous ban on Internet taxes, effective through November 2003. Better enjoy the reprieve while it lasts, though. Lawmakers are working to develop federal sales-tax guidelines to go into effect after the two-year extension ends.

LET'S CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF

A judge recently dismissed all charges against Oliver Jovanovic, a Columbia University doctoral candidate accused of holding captive and sexually torturing a woman he met online. Jovanovic, convicted in 1998 for kidnapping, assault, and sexual abuse, served almost two years in prison before the New York State Supreme Court reversed the decision—in part because of e-mail between the defendant and his accuser that had previously been deemed inadmissible. (In the December 1998 story, "A Tortured Case" by Robin Shamburg, *Y-Life* published the e-mail, raising questions about Jovanovic's guilt. Read it at **yil.com/jovanovic**.) Prosecutors decided against a retrial because the plaintiff was not emotionally prepared to testify again.

NUKE SITES NUKED

If you want to know where the nearest nuclear power plant is, don't count on the Web helping you out. The Feds have removed such details from government Web sites since the September 11 terror attacks. Much of the information will still be available from government offices, where terrorists are far less likely to go in search of such intelligence.

IT'S BAAAAAAAAAAAACK

In the months following the September 11 attacks, Americans logged on in record numbers, seeking everything from bioterrorism reports to Taliban-bashing. According to Nielsen/NetRatings, more than 115 million surfers connected to the Net during October alone (a hefty 15 percent increase over October 2000 traffic), deflating speculations on the downturn in Internet use.

THE CLICK AROUND THE NET CLIQUE: SCOTT ALEXANDER, ROB BERNSTEIN, MEAGHAN O'NEILL. WRITE TO CLICK AT CLICK@ZIFFDAVIS.COM

FOCUS: BIOTERRORISM

In the wake of bioterrorist attacks, Net information resources proliferated. Here's a sampling. For more anthrax-specific Web resources, visit **yil.com/anthrax**.

›The Washington Post Bioterrorism Page [washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/nation/specials/attacked/bioterrorism] The facts.

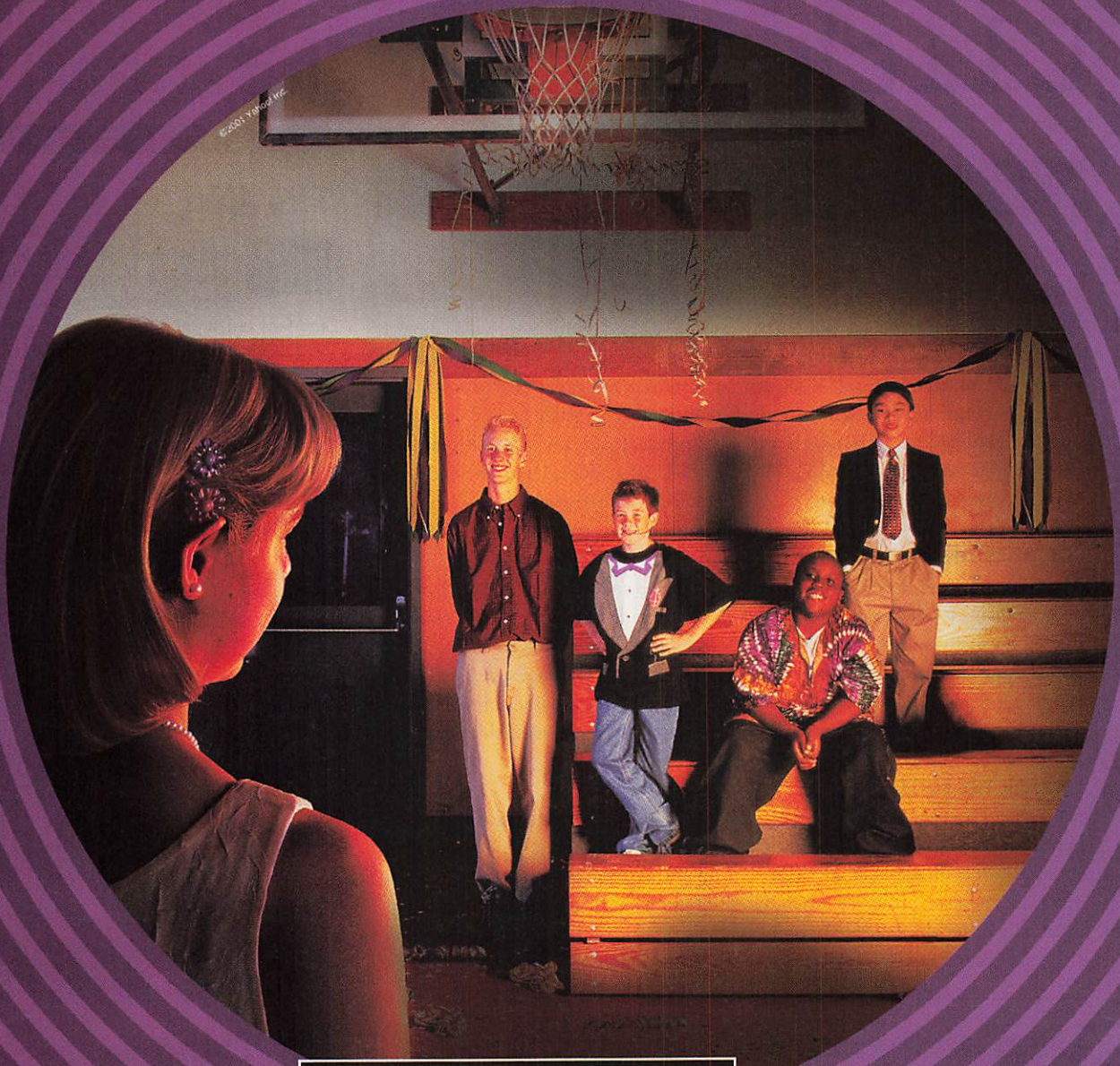
›The Bioweaponeers [cryptome.org/bioweap.htm] Who invented these new biological weapons, and why?

›Anthrax: Cold War Leaves a Deadly Anthrax Legacy [phaster.com/unpretentious/uzbekistan_anthrax.html] *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller's take on the Russian roots of an anthrax threat.

›Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies [www.hopkins-biodefense.org] Authoritative articles from the Johns Hopkins University Schools of Public Health and Medicine.

›Smallpox [whale.to/vaccines/smallpox.html] A global effort eradicated this incredibly deadly disease. Now terrorists threaten to reintroduce it as a weapon.

DEBORAH DAVIS/GETTYONE



Always comparison shop.

Need to pick up a few things? Hit Yahoo! Shopping. Search Shopping, Auctions, Classifieds and Warehouse all at the same time. It's a regular shopping buffet. shopping.yahoo.com

powered by COMPAQ

YAHOO! Shopping

Do You YAHOO!?

Click! around the net

Save! Delete!

Smart Moves... ...Dubious Deeds

GOODWILL GESTURE

After treating them like steroid-laden urine samples in 2000, the International Olympic Committee is finally showing online sports journalists some respect. Fifty dot-com media organizations have been granted credentials to the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City.

POP GOES THE WEASEL

The FTC is cracking down on the owner of more than 5,500 domain names—including 41 variations on the name Britney Spears. An FTC report claims these sites launch pop-up ads so persistent they often force users to reboot their computers.

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

San Francisco's Board of Supervisors is flouting federal law by refusing to install Internet filters on public library computers. It's a brave, pro–First Amendment stance, and one that could cost the city some federal funding.

DVD VD

You've heard of viruses spreading through e-mail. Now brace yourself for viruses traveling via contaminated DVDs. In November, Warner Bros. released the Powerpuff Girls DVD *Meet the Beat Alls*—which was infected with the decidedly unfunny FunLove virus.

MICKEY MOUSE ETHICS

In an episode of *The Proud Family*, a cartoon airing on the Disney Channel, a youngster downloads free music from an imaginary file-sharing system and brings about the demise of the entire music industry. What's next, *James and the Giant Leech*?

FAIL SAFE?

A House subcommittee gave the Defense Department an *F* for failing to take computer security measures despite reliable data showing that more than 20 countries are developing cyberwarfare techniques. Who would want to attack little old us?

'I feel guilty sometimes having to put my name on the songs. I do write them. I compose them, I do the scoring, I do the lyrics, I do the melodies, but still—it's the work of God'

MICHAEL JACKSON, ON GETMUSIC.COM, DISCUSSING HIS INSPIRATION FOR SONGWRITING

Top of the Net

MOVIES

Top five "most patriotic" American films of the past decade, according to surfers on Fandango [fandango.com]

1 SAVING PRIVATE RYAN
2 PEARL HARBOR
3 THE PATRIOT
4 INDEPENDENCE DAY
5 THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT

Ratings reflect voting during the week of 10/8/01.

FASTEST LOADING

Best-performing U.S. government sites*

1 FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION [www.fbi.gov]
2 THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS [www.loc.gov]
3 SUPREME COURT OF THE U.S. [supremecourtus.gov]
4 U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES [www.house.gov]
5 U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY [epa.gov]

SLOWEST LOADING

Worst-performing U.S. govt. sites*

1 SOCIAL SECURITY ONLINE [www.ssa.gov]
2 U.S. NAVY [www.navy.mil]
3 OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION [osha.gov]
4 THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE [www.nps.gov]
5 AIR FORCE LINK [www.af.mil]

*According to Keynote [keynote.com] Government 40 Internet Performance Index, week of 10/22/01.

netobsessions

The Girl

ALICIA KEYS

Her debut album, *Songs in A Minor*, sold more than 50,000 CDs the day it hit store shelves, and fans are singing her praises online. Keys's brilliant intertwining of R&B, jazz, hip-hop, and classical influences has inspired 97 clubs in her honor. Start @ **Alicia Keys [aliciakeys.net]**

The Thing

PAC-MAN FOR PALM

The real king of all media? Pac-Man has appeared on cereal boxes, lunch pails, and, of course, the Atari 2600. Now it's making its debut on the Palm OS ($10); the game is available in color but without Pac-Man's trademark "wakka-wakka" sound effects. Get your game on @ **PalmGear.com**

The Guy

HAYDEN CHRISTENSEN

Is there a more coveted film role than that of Anakin Skywalker in this summer's *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*? Answer: No, there is not. Fans of the sci-fi epic are already trading rumors online about Christensen's dark side, both on-screen and off. Join the chitchat @ **Hayden Palace [clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/haydenpalace]**

JAMES PATRICK COOPER/RETNA

It's time your ears enjoyed working at the computer.

Ears have needs, too. Big, booming, decibel-blasting needs. So we engineered our new 40-watt Champagne™ speaker system with enough room-rattling, eye-popping high fidelity to make your ears forget they're seated at a desk. Get yours at www.harman-multimedia.com. **harman/kardon®**

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LET THE NET DO IT BETTER

YOU-COMMERCE

CASH FOR YOUR CASTOFFS... AND NO AUCTION HASSLES

Here's a secret: To make money online, all you need is what you already have (but don't mind parting with). At **Amazon.com**, **Half.com**, **Switchouse [switchouse.com]**, and **Yahoo! Warehouse [warehouse.yahoo.com]**, sell your used books, music, games, and more without the complexities of an online auction. Post an item—specifying its name, condition, and price—and buyers will come to you. At Amazon, your item is listed alongside Amazon's own, new version of that merchandise (if available) as an alternative for bargain hunters. That means a disaffected teen looking for *The Catcher in the Rye* also has the option of buying your used copy, for the price you set (which must be less than Amazon's retail price by at least 10 percent). None of the four sites charges for listing items. Your proceeds can be deposited into any designated checking account. **JEREMY CAPLAN**

SITE	WHAT YOU CAN SELL	COMMISSION	SPECIAL FEATURES
AMAZON.COM	Books, CDs, computers, DVDs, kitchen goods, electronics, and more	99 cents, plus 15 percent of the selling price	Autographed or collectible items can be sold at higher prices.
HALF.COM	Books, CDs, computers, DVDs, electronics, trading cards, and more	5-15 percent, depending on the selling price	You can list multiple items for sale at once and can phone items in at no extra charge.
SWITCHOUSE [SWITCHOUSE.COM]	Books, CDs, electronics, games, software, hardware, and DVDs	14 percent	Lets you swap items with other sellers.
YAHOO! WAREHOUSE [WAREHOUSE.YAHOO.COM]	Books, music, DVDs, video games, and electronics	5 percent (for items over $500) to 10 percent (for items under $50)	The newest service. Yahoo! Auctions sellers can transfer their ratings here to attract potential buyers.

netsavers

Clip 'n' Save

SAVE MONEY

Big businesses have long used clipping services to track newspaper and magazine articles that mention them, their competitors, or their industry. Access to such information is a great competitive advantage, but subscribers pay handsomely for the privilege. **Clip Genius [clipgenius.com]** aims to bring the same service to individuals and small businesses who would rather pay $39 a month than $390. The site e-mails its subscribers daily customized news clippings from more than 160 online magazines, newspapers, and other publications. There are no hidden per-clip fees, you can change your search words at any time, and the e-mail delivery means you don't have to wait days to get a bunch of photocopies in the mail.

Forward Thinking

SAVE TIME

It's sad but true: Some people stick with crummy ISPs simply because they're unwilling to go through the hassle of changing e-mail addresses. But for those ready to take the plunge, **Re-route [re-route.com]** smooths the transition. Like those Change of Address cards you fill out at the post office when you move, Re-route facilitates mail forwarding. Give the service your old and new e-mail addresses, and it will forward messages to the new account while simultaneously informing senders of the new address. Of course, your old account must still be active when you sign up for the service—Re-route will let you know when to go ahead and cancel—but that cost (plus Re-route's charges of $10 a month, or $25 for three months) is a small price to pay for this convenience. **DON WILLMOTT**

READER: WILLIE MALDONADO/GETTYONE; SCISSORS: JEN FONG/PHOTONICA

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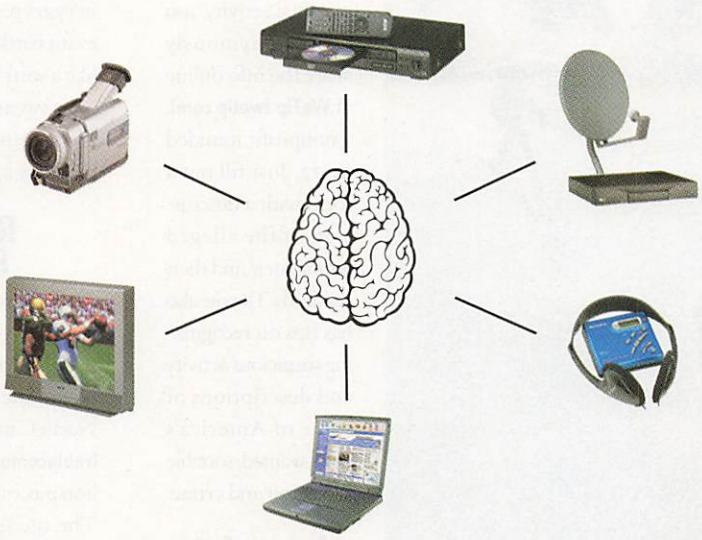

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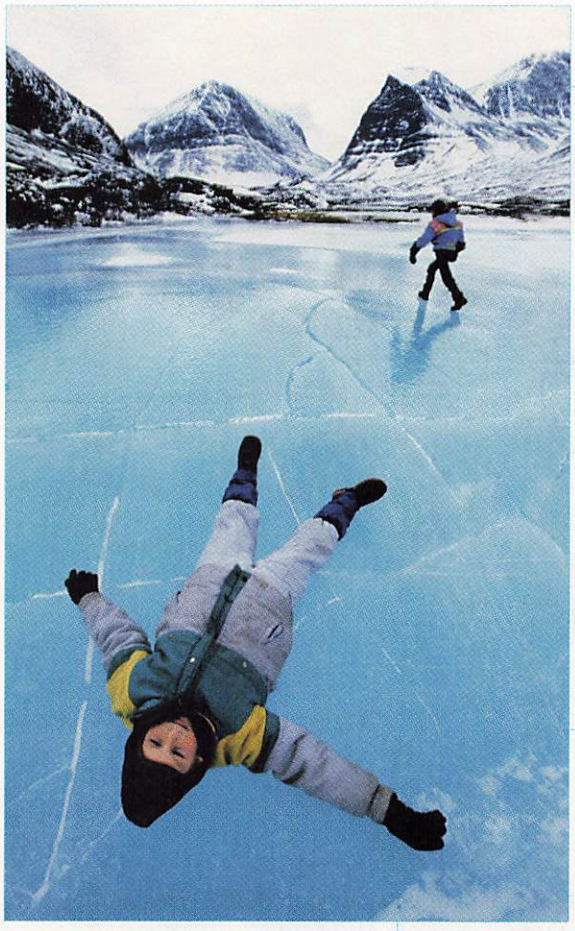
THIS MONTH'S MOST PRACTICAL DESTINATIONS BY JEREMY CAPLAN



Check for Days Off

The first snow day is usually the happiest day of the school year for kids. Many adults feel the same way about work. To find out as soon as possible whether school or the job is giving it a rest, log on to **Cancellations.com**. The service reports school and business closings, so you'll know early on whether to put on your boots and trudge to the bus stop or fire up some hot cocoa and plan your sledding route. Sign up for e-mail notification and you won't even have to visit the site at all. Check to see if your school district is listed; if not, earn some brownie points by letting the superintendent know.

Report a Crime

If you've witnessed criminal activity, you can anonymously share the info online at **WeTip [wetip.com]**, a nonprofit founded in '72. Just fill out a form with a description of the alleged wrongdoers and their misdeeds. The site also has tips on recognizing suspicious activity and descriptions of some of America's most wanted, sortable by region and crime.

Ace a Job Interview

"Beware of open-ended questions. Never tell anyone you're not interested in the job. Ask when you should meet again." That's just the beginning of the advice at **JobsOnTheWeb.com: Tips [jobsontheweb.com/tips.html]**, a site that collects great pointers on all aspects of the job hunt, especially the interview process. Scroll through the questions every candidate should ask ("What are the major frustrations of the job?") and questions interviewers may ask ("Academically, what were your worst subjects?"). Then read the 34 things never to do in an interview, and practice not doing them.

Be a History Whiz

Want to jump-start your next public speaking engagement? Whether you're addressing the nation or giving a toast, type in the date of your appearance at **Learning Network: This Day in History [infoplease.com/cgi-bin/dayinhistory]**. You'll find out what happened on that day in years past so you can reference a relevant battle, event, or death. You'll seem like a witty historian without even breaking a sweat. (Just for kicks, you can also use the site to find out who shares your birthday, the lucky dog.)

Replace That Broken Dish

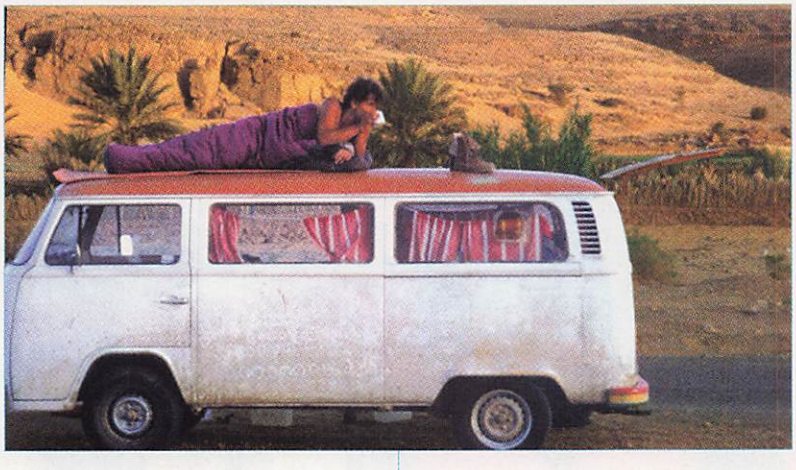
So you dropped the good sugar bowl, and now your wedding china is incomplete. What are you going to do (besides blame the family pet)? Check out the North Carolina–based **Replacements, Ltd. [replacements.com]**, which offers 8 million pieces of china in 160,000 patterns. The site sells silver and crystal as well, so there's no reason not to have a table worthy of Martha Stewart when company comes for dinner.

Clean Your Computer

If you use a lot of shareware or freeware, it's easy to unwittingly download "spyware." These programs sometimes come as part of other software, and they can meddle with your surfing or connect to Web sites without permission. Visit **Scumware.com** to learn how to rid

SEND US NEWS OF YOUR USEFUL FIND! WRITE TO IUS@ZIFFDAVIS.COM

GIRL ON ICE: JOHN BEATTY/GETTYONE; DISHES: MIKE HUTMACHER/NEWSCOM



your computer of such nuisances. As soon as you log on to the site it will recognize whether certain "scumware" has been inadvertently installed on your computer and show you how to clean it out.

Read Round the World

In recent months Americans have become much more interested in international affairs. Here's a way to keep the trend going. **OnlineNewspapers.com** is a no-nonsense site that connects you to newspapers around the world. Choose the place that interests you and get a list of edifying sources. As part of its informed mix, the site links to 11 papers from Saudi Arabia, six from Costa Rica, and 27 from Japan. U.S. papers are here, too. The site also accepts visitors' suggestions, adding new papers regularly.

Wield a Scalpel

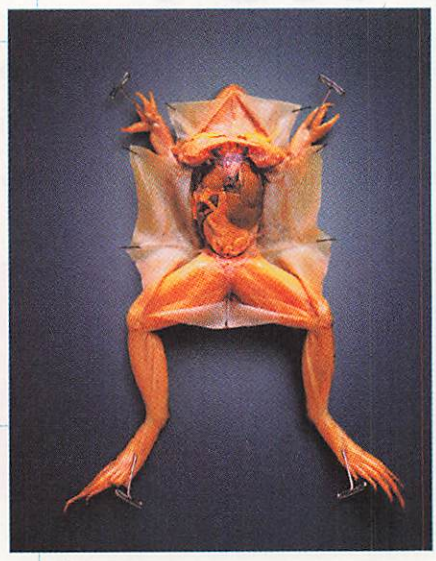
If you remember your high-school science labs with fondness (frog guts, anyone?), go to **TryScience [tryscience.org]**, a welcome doorway back to youth. Conduct experiments online using short Shockwave simulations, or learn about experiments you can do at home. The projects are interesting enough for adults, and the interface is easy enough for kids to use.

Research Any Word

The next time you're composing a poem or wrestling with a crossword puzzle, **RhymeZone [rhymezone.com]** can help. In addition to rhymes, the site will find synonyms, antonyms, homophones, definitions, or words that match a pattern. You can even find out where in Shakespeare's plays the word in question was mentioned or retrieve pictures associated with the word.

Share a Journey

When it comes to supercheap ways of getting from here to there, driving with others surely tops the list; **eRideShare [erideshare.com]** helps you find travel companions anywhere in the U.S. When we tried it, the site listed an impressive 948 carpools and 99 cross-country trips; and it's free to sign up to drive or be driven in a group. To get a list of available groups or drivers, choose the state in which you're seeking a carpool—or, if you're traveling, input your destination.



GUY ON VAN: JAN ERIK POSTH/NONSTOCK; FROG: CZARINA BUCKINGHAM/GETTYONE

...and downloads

MAKE A FACE

Sure, videophones *sound* cool, but do you really want to vid when you've just rolled out of bed and still have *schmutz* in your eyes? **SeeStorm Messenger [www.seestorm.com]** makes sure you look good all the time by using a 3-D avatar of you as a visual stimulus during your Net-based phone calls. Send in a digital photo and SeeStorm will create an avatar whose virtual eyes will blink and whose virtual mouth will move as you speak. Don't want to use your own face? Go to the site and download James Bond, a president, or any of the many other avatars. *Free.*

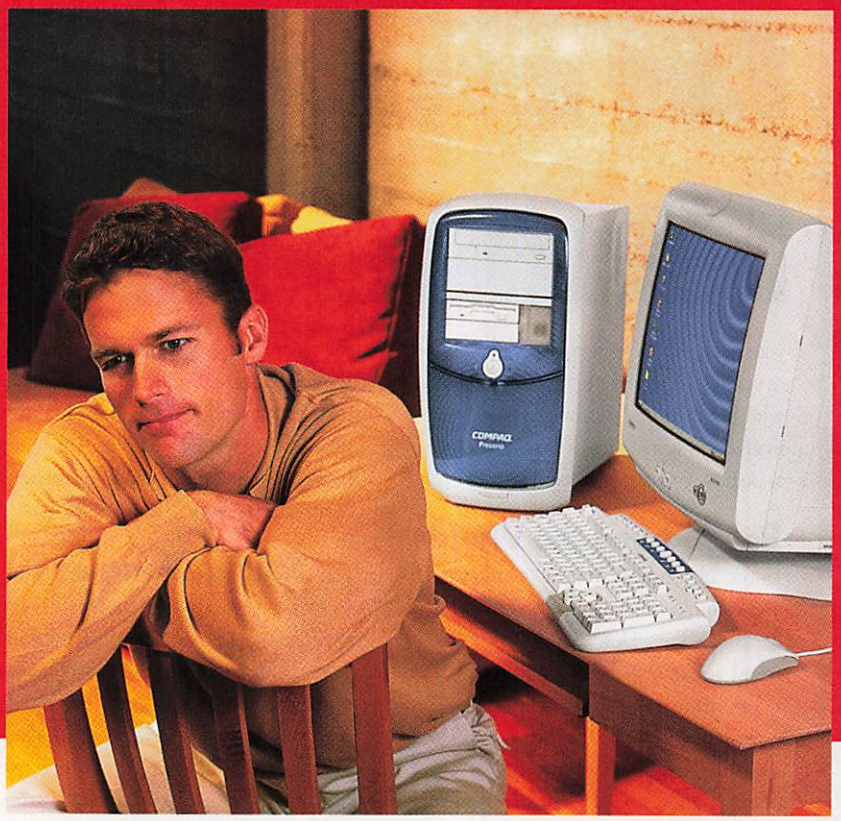
GET REAL

If you've been collecting various versions of RealPlayer and RealJukebox on your PC over the past six years, it's time to clean house. The new **RealOne Player [real.com]** supersedes everything Real Networks has created before. Built on a unified theory of online audio and video, it brings together streaming content, Internet radio, CD playing and burning, and MP3 management, all under one interface. *Free.*

GRAB A SCREEN

Every well-equipped Web surfer should have on hand a simple screen-capture utility with which to save memorable pictures or pages. **CaptureWizPro [pixelmetrics.com]** fits the bill. Like most screen grabbers, it remains active in the background, ready to pop up on request. Use it to capture a full screen or manipulate its unique floating frame until you've zeroed in on the piece of the page you'd like to save. *$29.95.* **DON WILLMOTT**

BUILT ON A RATHER SIMPLE, INNOVATIVE IDEA.



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16X CD-RW Drive[5]
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56K ITU V.90 Modem[3]
10/100 Network Interface Card
Soundmax II Digital Audio
JBL Platinum Speakers with Digital Audio Port
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128 MB SyncDRAM
20.0 GB UltraDMA Hard Drive[1]
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56K ITU V.90 Modem[3]
10/100 Network Interface Card
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COMPARING THE TRIED-AND-TRUE WITH THE NET-AND-NEW BY DAVID SHEFF

BUYING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

OLD WAY

1 I'm always looking for new kids' books. I regularly read reviews of the current crop and check out the best-sounding ones from the library. For gifts, however, I go to a local bookshop with little couches for restless kids.

2 The staff there often recommends books that the reviewers miss. We've found some great ones that way. This visit I left the shop with *So You Want to Be President* and *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type.* Both were big hits in our household.

TIME ELAPSED 45 minutes browsing and buying

COMMENTS Neither the kids nor I tire of reading the best of these children's books over and over again.

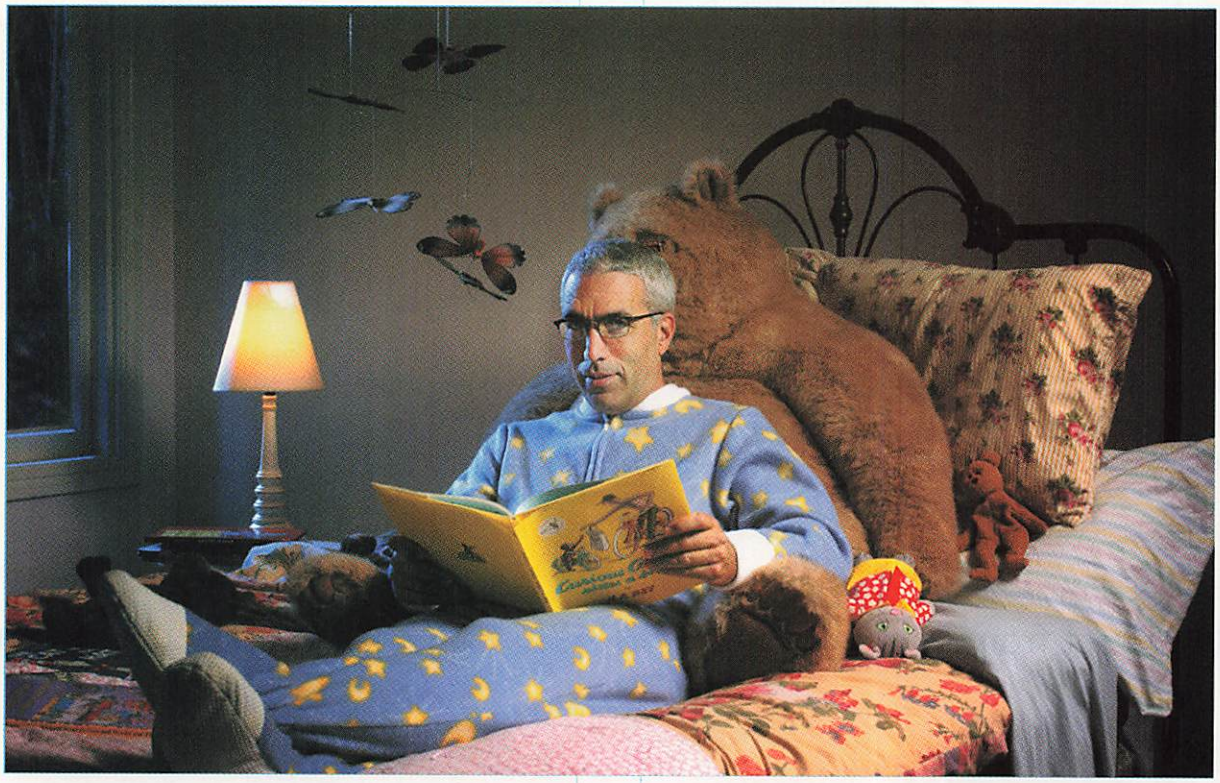
NET WAY

1 Reviews are plentiful online, and **ALA: American Library Association [www.ala.org]** lists award winners on its site. I decided to browse *Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters* and *Uptown,* which won the Coretta Scott King Award.

2 Examined the online booksellers at **BookPriceCompare.com**. But I want to see (and read) picture books before buying them. Headed back to the bookshop to browse, and purchased a big stack of great books.

TIME ELAPSED 60 minutes

COMMENTS Picture books need to be held and previewed in person, and my kids and I enjoy doing that.



BART NAGEL

WINNER: OLD WAY **You can't pore over the pages of picture books online...yet.**

MAKING NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

OLD WAY

1 It's that time again, and this year's resolutions seem particularly important. How do I want to conduct my life differently in 2002? My list began, "I resolve to give more—more money and more time—to those who are less fortunate."

2 I didn't want to forget about them, so I wrote this year's resolutions on a piece of paper and tacked them over my office desk. The theory: I will be reminded daily.

TIME ELAPSED 15 minutes

COMMENTS The New Year is a symbolic time of starting over, so reflection seems in order.

NET WAY

1 The Net lets you share your resolutions, turning a personal experience into a communal one. I read a bunch at various sites, including the international **The New Year Pages: New Year Resolutions [www.new-year.co.uk/resolutions/resframe.html]** and **Happy New Year! [theholidayspot.com/newyear]**. Some people resolved to get better grades and have more fun while others said they would volunteer at the local school, attend daily AA meetings, or do something every day to try to make the world a better place.

2 One site—**How-to-Keep-Your-New-Years-Resolution.com: Achieving Success [how-to-keep-your-new-years-resolution.com/html/success.html]**—offered wise advice, such as: "Don't try everything at once" and "Word it carefully." I can use all the help I can get.

TIME ELAPSED 15 minutes

COMMENTS It was reassuring to see that most people have their hearts in the right place.

WINNER: TIE **Offline it's a personal experience, but online supporters can help strengthen your resolve.**

SHOPPING FOR HEALTH INSURANCE

OLD WAY

1 Called the major health insurers in our area and spoke to their representatives and agents. The wide variety of plans, with differing coverage, deductibles, maximum benefits, and copayments, was overwhelming. So were the costs, which ranged from $300 to $1,200 a month for our family of five.

2 Decided to call friends and ask about their insurance. No one seemed thrilled with his plan. Decided to check the Net.

TIME ELAPSED 5 hours on the phone

COMMENTS For those of us without company-sponsored plans, the process of comparing costs and benefits is daunting.

NET WAY

1 Searched for *health insurance* and clicked on **eHealthInsurance.com**, where a cost-comparison form asked me to fill in my ZIP code and some information about my family. A list of dozens of plans materialized. It took only five minutes for me to get overloaded, instead of five hours. I guess that's progress.

2 Checked **ConsumerReports.org**, which offers a useful (and free) report on health insurance that includes a survey of thousands of customers.

TIME ELAPSED 1 hour online

COMMENTS I love the free access to *CR*'s trusted data.

WINNER: NET WAY **Not only was the Net Way much faster, but I also found more options online.**

Joseph Abboud green suede quilted jacket [saks.com]; Claiborne Menswear shirt and cardigan [macys.com]; alligator belt [brooksbrothers.com]; Joseph Abboud corduroy trousers [saks.com]

Fashion on the Fly

Q » I like to stay in style as much as the next guy but don't have time to pore over fashion magazines. Any no-nonsense sites you can suggest?

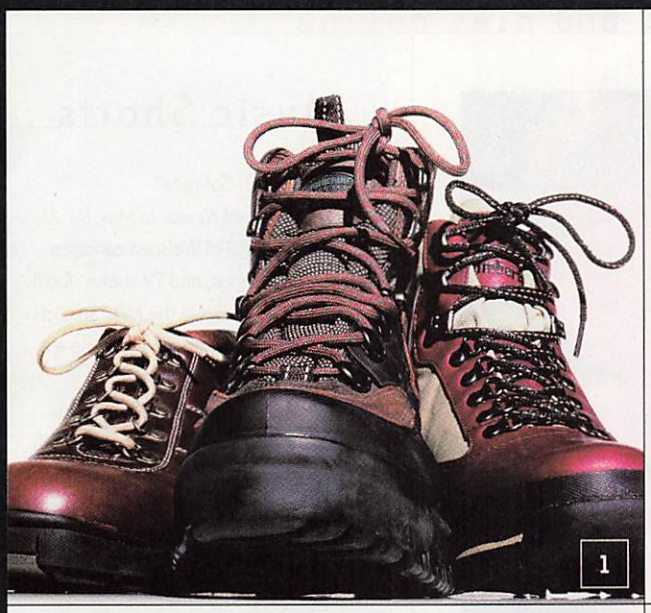
A » As the Net matures, so does its ability to deliver some truly chic fashion tips. For digital diehards such as yourself, **Modern Clothes for the Modern Man [modernman.com/clothes]** provides definitive, plain-English advice. To get the inside track on what's coming down the runway this season, **Harry Rosen [www.harryrosen.com]** is a site you'll want to bookmark. And if you're willing to add a couple of fashion treatises to your library, you can't go wrong with a search at your favorite online bookseller for any title by either Donald Charles Richardson or Alan J. Flusser, two well-known and deservedly trusted menswear authorities.

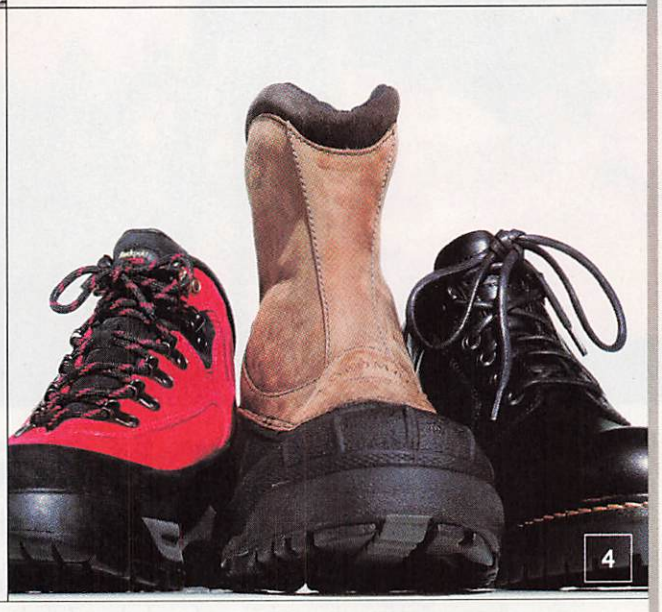
Q » Though I'm a natural when it comes to fashion and interior design, my talents fall flat in the kitchen. But I like to entertain. Have any shortcuts?

A » If you know the difference between a cappuccino machine and a food processor, you can host a dinner party with fare that compares to the finest restaurant's. **Impromptu Gourmet [impromptugourmet.com]** sells delicious cook-it-yourself meal kits conceived by some of the country's best-known chefs. The culinary wizards-in-residence at such renowned eateries as New York City's Jean-Georges and Le Bernardin, among other hot spots nationwide, provide the expertise behind these overnight-mail productions. Just determine the tastes of your potential guests (for instance, is it an aged-sirloin or lemongrass-chicken type of group?) and then select from the service's current list of entrée offerings ($38 to $45 per serving).

Warren Christopher has the answers. Write to askwarren@ziffdavis.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVIES+STARR





The War on Winter

1 » BOOTING UP These boots with waterproof lug soles look as good in the office as on the street; $185, $123, and $110 a pair at **Cole Haan [colehaan.com]**, **Wolverine [wolverinebootsandshoes.com]**, and **Timberland [timberland.com]**.

2 » SOCK IT AWAY Make no mistake: People notice your socks—especially when they don't match. But these duo-toned classics will get attention for the right reasons; $26.50 per pair at **Paul Stuart [paulstuart.com]**.

3 » HAND JIVE You can't create the perfect snowball with frostbitten digits. These durable basics give flexibility and warmth. Let the games begin; $27 a pair, **Woolrich [woolrich.com]**; $55 a pair, **The North Face [thenorthface.com]**.

4 » TROOPERS This foul weather–friendly footgear is long on style; $155, $95, and $185, from **Rockport [rockport.com]**, **Eddie Bauer [eddiebauer.com]**, **Johnston & Murphy [johnstonandmurphy.com]**. **MEAGHAN O'NEILL**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVIES+STARR

Content

what to watch, hear, read, and play online

Music

DANCE ON FIRE

Rare Doors recordings are now a Web exclusive

WHEN THE SURVIVING MEMBERS OF THE DOORS ANNOUNCED THAT THEY'D BE RELEASING A SERIES of live albums culled from their archives exclusively through the band's official site, even die-hard fans wondered if there was anything left worth mining. But that was before they heard *Live in Detroit*, which many now regard as the Jim Morrison–led band's best concert collection. And the latest *Live at the Aquarius Theatre* releases, *The First Performance* and *The Second Performance*, are even better. Recorded on July 21, 1969, these two double-disc sets present the two shows the Doors played that night and bear witness as the band recaptures the fire and fury of its early days. While a third release, *Highlights from the Aquarius Theatre Performances*, provides a single-disc survey of the evening, the unabridged versions unambiguously show why the band decided to open its vaults. **The Doors [thedoors.com]** PAUL SEMEL

CHECK IT OUT GO TO YIL.COM/CRITICS FOR MORE INFO

Music Shorts

R.E.M. "Live in Cologne"
When it released *Reveal* in May, R.E.M. played a handful of Webcast concerts, acoustic radio gigs, and TV shows. You'll find all those shows in the MP3 area of this site's Music category, including a brilliant concert from Cologne, Germany (click on Koln), in which new tunes mix with old faves such as "South Central Rain" and "Cuyahoga." P.S.
★★★★ **[m2k1.murmurs.com]**

BADGER "Internet Favourites"
The Net loves high concepts such as this: your basic guitar/violin/electro-gadget folk-rock trio, featuring the son and daughter of definitive *Hulk* artist Herb Trimpe. Venturing from its home terrain in New York mountain country, Badger's alt-roots sound is electrifying, mixing grungy Celtic fiddling with violin psychedelia and pastoral power-pop. A.M. ★★★½ **[mp3.com/badger]**

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER "Hagar"
The poster band for New York's Jewish alternative-music movement, Pharaoh's Daughter brings a basement-band exu-

berance to an ancient repertoire, adding DIY rawness and world-beat influences to timeless Middle Eastern material. A.M.
★★★★ **[pharaohsdaughter.com]**

MORRISON: YALE JOEL/TIMEPIX; PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER: MARCOS RIBIERO

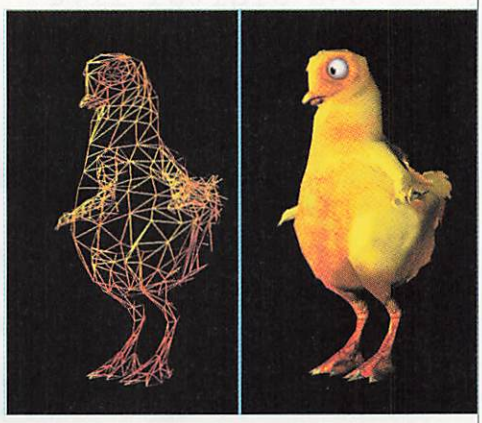
MON **GERMAN LANGUAGE BEGINNERS CHAT** 9 P.M. PRACTICE YOUR *DEUTSCH* **[GERMAN.ABOUT.COM/MPCHAT.HTM]**

TUE **BUFFY CHATROOM** 3 P.M. VOLUBLE VAMP **[WWW.BBC.CO.UK/LIVECHAT/CHATROOMS/CHAT_CULT.SHTML]**

WED **SPACE CHAT** 3 P.M. GET STARSTRUCK **[WWW.BBC.CO.UK/SCIENCE/SPACE/SPACECHAT]**

Games ▪ 'CREATURE' COMFORTS

The popular Black & White gets some new twists



HAVING ENJOYED ENORMOUS SUCCESS since its launch earlier this year (see Content, July '01), Electronic Arts' "God game" Black & White has millions of computer gamers worldwide feverishly clicking away. Now the first official expansion pack, Creature Isle, is set to debut. The $30 add-on disk emphasizes your "creature"—be it a croc, lion, ape, or rhino. The goal? To help your creature mate with a female, Eve. But as in real life, this isn't so easy. The creature must first successfully accomplish a handful of tasks to win her admiration (isn't that always the way?).

Like the original game, Creature Isle supports a robust online component, allowing up to eight player-creatures to come together in combat with new fighting styles, moves, and powers. The site also offers free Black & White add-ons, including music tracks and a soccer minigame. **[bwgame.com]** **MARC SALTZMAN**

Books ▪ FAMILIAR HORRORS

Witnesses to September 11 converge in a new e-book

HERE'S THE RARE BOOK THAT MAKES E-PUBLISHING SEEM WORTHWHILE. PRODUCED IN LITTLE over a week by about 75 contributors, the e-book *09/11 8:48 AM: Documenting America's Greatest Tragedy* records dozens of impressions of the September 11 catastrophe with searing intensity. If the news is the first draft of history, this is the second.

Of course, readers whose eyes have been welded to the news since that day may not learn much new. The witnesses here range from pilots and priests to professors, and their stories are by now gruesomely familiar, calling to mind Stephen Dedalus's reflection in *Ulysses*: "I hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry, and time one livid final flame." But the reiteration of crashing airplanes and collapsing towers and desperately yearning loss won't keep most from reading these accounts compulsively. Jay Rosen—who as chair of New York University's Journalism Department helped coordinate the project—quotes 20th-century political theorist Hannah Arendt: "The struggle to believe the evidence of our senses is at the root of all moral life." A hundred recountings of this event barely yield the beginnings of moral comprehension.

The book's only drawback is the third section, "Angles of Vision," in which contributors were invited to reflect on how the U.S. ought to react. The message is disappointingly single-minded, repeatedly arguing that America is to blame for what happened and that retaliation only perpetuates the cycle of violence. The inclusion of such views is not the problem; it's the lack of opposing perspectives that severely narrows the angle of vision of an otherwise cathartic reading experience.

Proceeds generated by *09/11* are being donated to the American Red Cross. **Booksurge [booksurge.com]** e-book ($6), paperback ($14.99) **CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT**

Game Shorts

DUNGEON SIEGE Heralded as a "Diablo killer," this eagerly anticipated role-playing action game features a deep story line, intuitive controls, and beautiful environments. Players can customize each party to include up to eight characters, and a built-in matchmaking lobby lets adventurers meet online to play. **M.S.** ★★★★ **[dungeonsiege.com] (Microsoft, $49.99)**

MAX PAYNE: KUNG FU EDITION While not messing with the gritty Max Payne story line, this free, homemade modification introduces some deadly hand-to-hand moves, such as forward flips and roundhouse kicks. It also adds new camera angles, some weapon changes, and the ability to shift from one playing level to another anytime. **M.S.** ★★★ **[maxpaynecenter.com/downloads/modsindex] (Free)**

Book Short

DIGITOPIA: THE LOOK OF THE NEW DIGITAL YOU With the onset of virtual reality and real virtuality, will we become as shallow as a kiddie pool? In 25 essays, psychologist Richard DeGrandpre explores the dark side of an emerging digital dreamland. Though he takes care not to simplify his issues, the repetitive prose often muddles a powerful theme: In our surge toward an electronic future, we risk leaving our humanity behind. **N.M.** ★★★ **[bn.com] (In print, or by download)**

THE CONTENT COMMITTEE: ADAM MCGOVERN, NAN MOONEY, MARC SALTZMAN, PAUL SEMEL

THU **TEA WITH TED** 6 P.M. DISHING HOLLYWOOD DIRT **[EONLINE.COM/GOSSIP]**

FRI **FANTASY FORUM** 5 P.M. DREAM TEAMS **[ESPN.GO.COM/COMMUNITY/CHAT/INDEX.HTML?QT=CHAT]**

SUN **WINE-GRAPE GROWING CHAT** 2 P.M. A CULTIVATING CONVERSATION **[GRAPECHAT.COM]**

CHICK: COURTESY OF BWGAME.COM; MAX PAYNE: REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT

cool tools

ultimate accessories for the digital life

GUILT-FREE TO GO

No, it's not a golf cart. Ford's **Think Neighbor** is an ecofriendly way to make short trips around the neighborhood without the expense of maintaining a car. The electric vehicle can be charged up at any 120-volt household outlet, lasts for 30 miles on a full battery, has zero emissions, and achieves a top speed of 25 mph while barely making a sound. Independent suspension and rack-and-pinion steering give a carlike ride, and plenty of options are available—everything from a cooler/mister to a moon roof. **Starts at about $6,000 [thinkmobility.com]**

IMPROVE YOUR IMAGE

Olympus already has a great reputation for high-end digital cameras, and now it is enhancing its offerings in the point-and-shoot arena. The pocket-size, 6-ounce **Olympus Brio D-230** has an autofocus lens with 5X digital zoom, automatic flash with red-eye reduction, special effects such as sepia and black-and-white imaging, and a video mode that can save a minute-long movie shot at 15 frames per second. A 16MB SmartMedia card is included. **$299 [olympusamerica.com]**

TELEPHONIC CONVERGENCE

What's in the **PC-EPhone**? What *isn't*? The Windows CE-based handheld organizer is not only a cell phone but also a complete PDA that delivers the wireless Web to its large, touch-sensitive color screen. It has 32MB of RAM and a CompactFlash Type II slot for memory upgrades. It's not as small or sleek (or affordable) as Windows CE-based models from Compaq and HP, but the huge screen sure is hard to resist. **$999 [pc-ephone.com]**

cool tools

by don willmott

BOY OH BOY

CMC's CyberBoy stretches the definition of "all in one." Like a Swiss Army knife, this PDA does everything. Its Palm-like daily organizer and address-book programs sync to Outlook, and it includes an MP3 player and audio recorder, an FM radio, and a built-in low-resolution digital camera (around back) that captures short video clips. With only 8MB of memory on board, though, you'll need to cough up more dough for extra SmartMedia cards if you want to shoot a lot of photos or listen to a few hours' worth of tunes. Everything connects to your PC via USB. **$349 [www.cmcia.com/eng/index-eng.html]**

LET THE SHOW BEGIN

You've converted to digital photography, and everything's great...except for the fact that Grandma and Grandpa have to hunch over your PC to view the pictures. Why not gather round the TV instead? Use the software included with the **Microsoft TV Photo Viewer** to make albums of digital photos and save them in a special format on floppy disks. Then pop the disks into the gadget (which connects to the TV), and sit back and watch. **$159 [microsoft.com]**

CATCH A WAVE

The Bose Wave radio has long been popular with the free-spending Sharper Image crowd. Its computer-enabled cousin, the **Bose Wave/PC**, gives you an easy, high-quality way to enjoy Net radio, CDs played through your PC, and your MP3 collection. A credit-card-size remote and six presets for each audio source make it easy to switch functions. One caveat: The connector is only 15 feet long, so chances are the Wave/PC will have to live in the same room as your PC. **$449 [bose.com]**

webuser >

HOW TO GET THE MOST NET IN THE LEAST TIME

EDITED BY DON WILLMOTT

find it

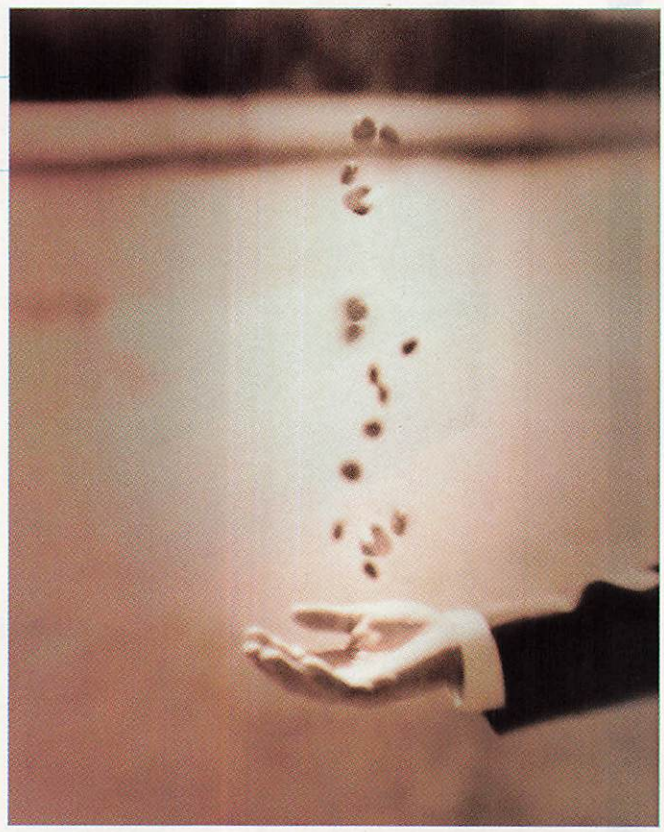
ADVERTISERS CAN BUY THEIR WAY INTO SOME SEARCH ENGINES' RESULTS. SO WHAT?

Last July, one of Ralph Nader's watchdog groups, **Commercial Alert [www.commercialalert.org]**, complained to the Federal Trade Commission that many search engines weren't adequately disclosing the fact that some of their search results had been paid for by advertisers who wanted to guarantee themselves a top listing.

You can find such results all over the Net under headings such as Sponsored Links, Partner Links, or, as in the case of Lycos, the not-quite-crystal-clear Featured Listings. MSN.com attaches a long explanation to its Featured Sites search results that spells out what they are. Yahoo! calls them Sponsored Sites.

As it turns out, many of these search results come from one place: **Overture [overture.com]** (formerly known as GoTo.com), a rare dot-com success that's always been up-front about the yellow pages–like service it provides. In fact, each pay-for-placement search result at Overture includes a disclosure that tells you exactly how much the advertiser forked over for that position. Overture distributes these listings to sites such as AOL, EarthLink, Lycos, and Yahoo!, and lets them label the links however they want.

Meanwhile, Overture's 45,000-plus advertisers get a direct line to consumers who are looking for a specific item or service. Eighty Overture editors screen incoming listings to make sure they're not only aboveboard but also associated with the appropriate keywords, so they'll show up in the right places. Overture executives claim that every search engine is affected by commercialism, owing to the "search-result optimization" industry, which helps commercial interests shove their way to the top of the results heap.



ANN CUTTING/PHOTONICA

The bottom line, according to Overture, is simple: If businesses get leads from the Net, they should pay for them, because that will help keep Net searching free. Whether or not search engines are doomed without paid listings, it pays to take a closer look at your search results and understand what you're seeing.

quick tips

WONDER WHEEL

It's not just for scrolling anymore. Turns out the Microsoft Wheel Mouse is a multitalented browsing tool. By pressing the Control key while turning the wheel, you can magnify or shrink the size of the text on a Web page. This trick also works for resizing text in Microsoft Word and Excel documents.

REPEAT AFTER ME

So long as your sound card can play it, **Total Recorder [highcriteria.com]** can record it. The PC-only software can even capture audio from digital media players, including Microsoft Windows Media Player and Apple QuickTime. The unregistered version of Total Recorder is free, but users can record only up to 40 seconds of audio. The registered version costs $11.95.

WINDOWS PATCHWORK

Surfers who use Windows Media Player version 6.4, 7.0, or 7.1 to listen to streaming media content (such as Net radio stations) should take note: A security hole in the software can allow hackers to run malicious Windows-crashing code on your PC. A fix, along with an explanation of the glitch, is available at the **Microsoft.com Download Center [microsoft.com/downloads/release.asp?releaseID=31459]**.

learn it >

AOL GETS YET ANOTHER FACE-LIFT IN VERSION 7.0, BUT CALLING IT AN UPGRADE IS A REAL STRETCH

LISTEN AND LOOK AOL 7.0 includes new instant-messaging and Net radio features, as well as improvements to the You've Got Pictures service.

.01 a few good changes

AOL continues to improve, but ever so slowly. What's new in 7.0? The AOL Calendar now lets you drag and drop appointments onto other dates in the calendar. It's about time. You can also add local happenings to your calendar simply by clicking on links scattered throughout the service's content areas. And you can create direct pathways to news, weather, and MovieFone listings right from the Welcome screen. As for You've Got Pictures 2.0, it now works with nearly any brand of digital camera, which means you can upload images directly to the service's photo gallery from connected cameras and scanners.

.02 music for the masses

Perhaps the most significant addition to AOL 7.0 is Radio@AOL, which is accessible from the toolbar. It provides subscribers with access to 75 radio channels, including Awesome '80s, Country, R&B, World Music, and Classical. It's a nice addition to the service, but the music selection pales in comparison with that of other online radio sources (such as Live365.com), which are free Web services. Still, the Radio button makes access to streaming music that much more convenient for those who like to stay in the AOL environment. Not surprisingly, Radio@AOL has direct links to CDNow so listeners can purchase albums.

.03 mixed mailbag

Improvements in e-mail and instant messaging are lackluster. Added to the composition window is an "auto-suggest" feature, which works just like the auto-complete features in Outlook Express and Netscape Mail that attempt to guess the e-mail address of your correspondent (assuming you've stored it in your address book). Outgoing e-mail messages now display the service's yellow "running man" icon next to the name of recipients who are currently online, in case you want to IM them instead. For members who check e-mail via AOL Mobile Communicator, check in at Keyword: *AOL Wireless*, where you can learn about the latest wireless plans, as well as other AOL initiatives, including AOL for PDAs and AOL by Phone.

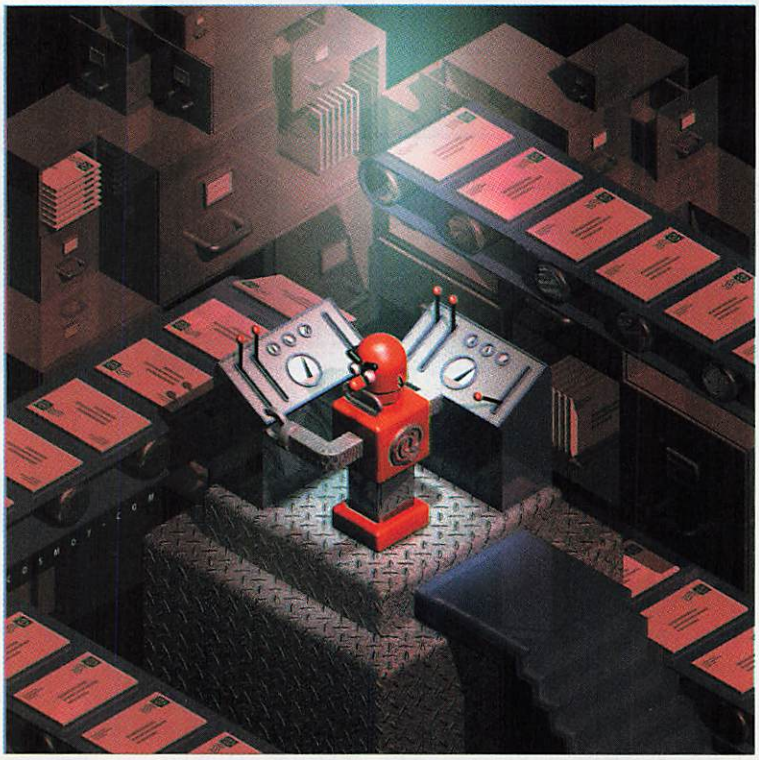
.04 download it?

Most changes to AOL 7.0 are almost entirely cosmetic, so there's no need for subscribers to scramble to upgrade. The software is compatible with Windows XP but requires XP users to have Internet Explorer 6.0. With Windows 95, 98, ME, or 2000, you need only IE 5.*x* or greater. Of course, the AOL software is as enormous as ever, demanding from 118MB to 233MB of disk space (depending on your OS). And keep in mind that you can install this upgrade without deleting previous versions—just in case you don't like it.

ROB BERNSTEIN

webuser surf guru

MAKE SENSE OF YOUR E-MAIL MESS; ARE RECORDABLE DVDs READY FOR PRIME TIME?



Q» I need to keep most of my incoming and outgoing e-mail messages. Is there an easy way to organize them and keep them safe?

A» As an e-mail pack rat from way back, I know what a nightmare tracking down old correspondence can be. Fortunately, for people like us, there's **Mailbag Assistant [fookes.com]**, a PC-only program that works with your existing e-mail client to organize messages. The software offers various searching tools, as well as an archiving feature for storing many thousands of missives. Mailbag Assistant is free to try and $29.95 to buy.

Q» Should I download MSN Explorer? Is it better than Internet Explorer?

A» While I like MSN Explorer's playful and simple interface (it provides lots of cutesy icons), it's clearly geared to the beginner. As Microsoft's latest entry in the browser market, it integrates Hotmail, MSN Messenger, and other MSN services into a single package. But Internet Explorer 6.0 affords you way more control over the total browsing experience; MSN Explorer, for instance, doesn't let you change its home page and lacks an accessible history file or a customizable toolbar for links. My advice: If you're comfortable using IE, stick with it. However, if curiosity gets the better of you, there's no harm in taking MSN Explorer for a spin. It's a small download (a svelte 5MB), and it won't overwrite Internet Explorer.

Q» Is there such a thing as a DVD player that will let me record movies?

A» Yes. Recordable DVD drives have been available to consumers for several months. But chances are you don't want one yet. Like seemingly all new technology products, this one has two competing digital media formats: DVD+RW and DVD-RAM. It's too soon to say which standard will win out—so buy at your own risk. Also, these drives are quite expensive (ranging from $500 to $1,000) and tend to record rather slowly (it can take up to an hour to save a 4GB movie to disc). If I still haven't succeeded in dissuading you from purchasing a recordable DVD player, consider this final point: The movie industry has made certain that you cannot directly record your DVD movies onto blank DVD discs.

EDDIE BOWEN/WWW.COSMO7.COM

aol watch

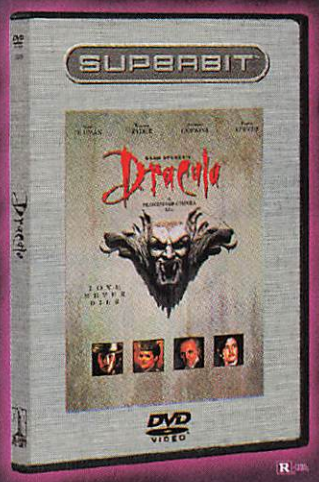
If your computer is dragging as you surf the Net, the culprit may be a bloated cache. A cache is a temporary storage place on your hard drive for site info; browsers store this data locally so that sites you've visited recently will load faster when you return to them. In AOL, the cache can get too full and drain PC resources, so it's a good idea to clear it now and then. Click the Settings menu and choose Preferences. Click Internet Properties and then, under the heading Temporary Internet Files, click Delete Files. Also see **Cache Killer Pro II [cachekiller.com]** and **Cache & Cookie Washer for America Online [webroot.com/washaol.html].**

MORE GURU FOR DAILY TIPS AND ADVICE, SURF OVER TO YIL.COM/GURU

"(The Superbit™ titles) are doozies! When friends come over, now you can really show off! Rating A."
- ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"Spectacular"
-The Wall Street Journal

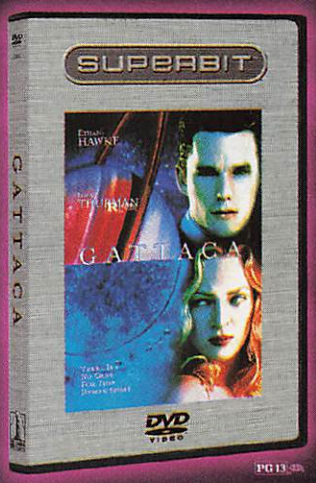
"Superbit™ is the superstar of DVD!"
- Mark A. Rivera, GENRE ON LINE



THE EVOLUTION OF DVD IS HERE!

SUPERBIT™

Pure Performance DVD VIDEO



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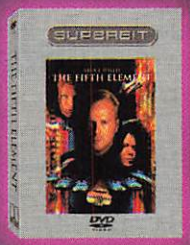

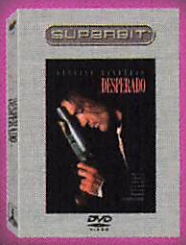

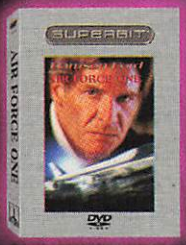

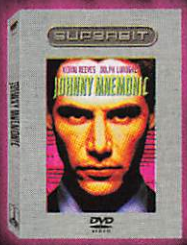

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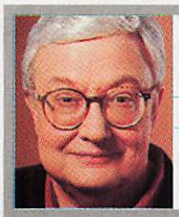


EBERT TO INTERNET: OH, GROW UP!

Childhood is over. It's time for the Internet to grow up and get serious. In these uneasy days, the Net seems more than ever a lifeline of communication and sanity. When phone lines were overloaded on September 11, it was a way to get in touch with friends and family. When the anthrax scourge surfaced, the Net was an alternative to the postal service. And when the editor of the *Arizona Daily Star* announced that she would stop accepting snail-mail letters to the editor, we crossed some sort of symbolic line.

Was it only three months ago that I published a column here about e-mail etiquette? The column was written pre–September 11, an innocent time. Now we need to look harder at how our society can be responsible about the Internet. Here are some ideas:

1. Workable, enforceable laws must be passed to outlaw spam. We have a finite amount of time available in which to deal with e-mail and, with its increasing importance, the maddening daily infection of porn promos and get-rich-quick scams has to stop. It is a waste of bandwidth and a theft of time.

2. E-mail programs such as Outlook Express and Eudora should be revised by their makers in four ways:

a. All outgoing messages should be automatically configured as pure text by default. Messages involving display typefaces, colors, or HTML language should be queried with a message box: "This formatting will increase the size of your message by *x* times, consuming bandwidth and extending the recipient's download time. Are you sure you want to do this?"

b. A Block Address button, such as the one in Yahoo! Mail and MSN Hotmail, should replace Outlook Express's five-step process of setting up a Mail Rule to block a spammer.

c. When a message arrives that was also sent to many other people, the program's default reply mode should send only to the single address that sent the message to you. A default of Reply to All clogs the mailboxes of uninterested strangers and can expose private e-mail addresses to spammers.

d. E-mail software that opens attached binaries or runs scripts should include virus-detecting defenses that do not allow downloaded files to do *anything* until they are scanned. These defenses would auto-update as necessary. Viruses are too serious a threat to Net health to be left to optional stand-alone programs.

3. Ask yourself: Is this trip really necessary? The dramatic downturn in air travel revealed that many trips were not. Some business travel was revealed as busywork. You fly in and see the guy, you fly out, you're *still* on the phone with him the next day. The Internet can replace unnecessary trips, not only with videoconferencing, but also with message boards, where business partners can update each other daily or hourly.

The Internet can replace unnecessary trips, not only with videoconferencing, but also with message boards, where business partners can update each other

What about an *easy* way to set up an online videoconference? It has been more than 10 years since I first saw the pioneering CUseeMe demonstrated, and most Netizens *still* don't know how to send and receive live streaming video, set up an online video chat, or hold an online conference. Since most users want to do the same thing ("set up a videoconference with this address or these addresses"), ways to do it should be automated. The portal site that makes this happen will have a killer app on its hands.

4. Ask yourself: Is this snail mail really necessary? Take my corner of the world as an example: I hate to break this news to the movie studios that send me press releases, but I never open any of them. I find out everything I need to know on the Web. Instead of printing and mailing elaborate press kits, the studios should post downloadable artwork on the Web (some do) and assign someone to update **The Internet Movie Database [imdb.com]** entries for their new releases.

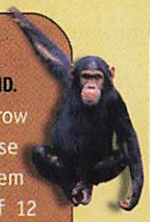
At some point in the past 10 years, using the Net stopped being an option and became a requirement. It's time to discourage the irresponsible forwarders, formatters, and spammers who misuse it. How does the song go? "You don't know what you've got till it's gone." ■

PAUL ELLEDGE

IT'S LIKE RUNNING ANY OTHER BUSINESS. EXCEPT THE SNAKES ARE EASIER TO RECOGNIZE.

Managing a corporation isn't easy, but in the new PC game, Zoo Tycoon™, at least you know you're dealing with animals. Over 40 species in fact. Each with its own characteristics, habitat and needs. Hire zookeepers to help you care for them. That'll free you up to look after your guests — and profits.

EVERY ORGANIZATION HAS EMPLOYEES THAT MONKEY AROUND.
For kicks your gorillas will throw poop at your guests. Those silly pranksters. Cage them properly by choosing one of 12 fencing materials.

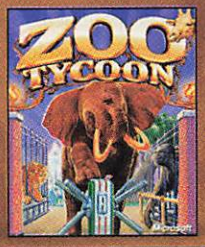


SOME SNAKES ARE MORE POISONOUS THAN OTHERS.
They're sneaky, slimy and they reside in your House of Reptiles. Other buildings you'll put in your zoo include gift shops, hamburger stands and compost buildings. If you actually want to sell burgers, think twice about putting the burger stands next to the compost buildings.

THE WEAK ARE ALWAYS PREYED UPON.
Poor gazelles. Always eaten alive. But that happens when you're at the bottom of the corporate food chain. Keep them away from the lions' cage, unless your big cats deserve a 5-star meal.

WATCH OUT FOR THE SCAVENGERS AT THE BOTTOM.
Hyenas have no morals. But, these heartless beasts are easier to control in their home, the African grasslands. Build them a habitat where they can thrive off the land and feel at home by using over 175 exhibit and zoo-building materials.

Office politics are only one part of Zoo Tycoon. For more info on other facets of the game, go to microsoft.com/games/zootycoon



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — MILD VIOLENCE

BLUE FANG GAMES

Microsoft microsoft.com/games/zootycoon

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ANGELA GUNN

NET ETHICS

ARE SPAMMERS E-TERRORISTS?

Q: I want to talk about the incredible amount of spam I get, without having handed out my e-mail address to more than a few friends. Spammers are electronic terrorists. They waste our time, bandwidth, and more. So why don't we enlist the other e-terrorists, the denial-of-service guys, and harness their talents? Why can't a handful of such blue-chip companies as Yahoo! pay these guys to launch unrelenting DoS attacks on those ISPs that are specifically set up to service and hide spammers—or that simply don't care about how they earn revenue?
A: Tell you what. Promise me you'll reserve the term "terrorist" for people who truly cause terror rather than extreme annoyance, and in return I'll explain how to get these oafs off your back.

First off, denial-of-service attackers, who bombard Web servers with so much garbage that they knock the computers offline, aren't talented. Usually they're "script kiddies"—unskilled, would-be hackers using other people's code to make mischief. Doing DoS bombardment on spam-friendly ISPs, though appealing payback, is problematic since denial-of-service attacks clog the rest of the Net with junk, too.

Instead, acquaint yourself with the guys who play whack-a-mole with spammers for a living. The smart folks behind **@MAPS: Mail Abuse Prevention System [mail-abuse.org]** keep a "black hole" list of troublemakers, and they have excellent ethical procedures for sorting out spammers. Closer to home, many ISPs can help you shoot down spammers before their junk e-mail reaches you; check with your e-mail provider to see how to set up your system to automatically trash-can that rubbish. When you do get spammed, forward a copy with as much header information as possible to your ISP's abuse desk; you can find the address at the **Network Abuse Clearinghouse [abuse.net]**.

Attackers who bombard Web servers with so much garbage that they knock the computers offline are usually "script kiddies"—unskilled, would-be hackers

Q: When is it all right to link to other people's Web sites?
A: Sometimes. Since the Web was built to allow people to link computers to other computers, you'd think it would always be okay to link, especially if you're linking because you admire someone's page. Not so fast! Sometimes linking can hurt the sites you love (the ones you shouldn't hurt at all).

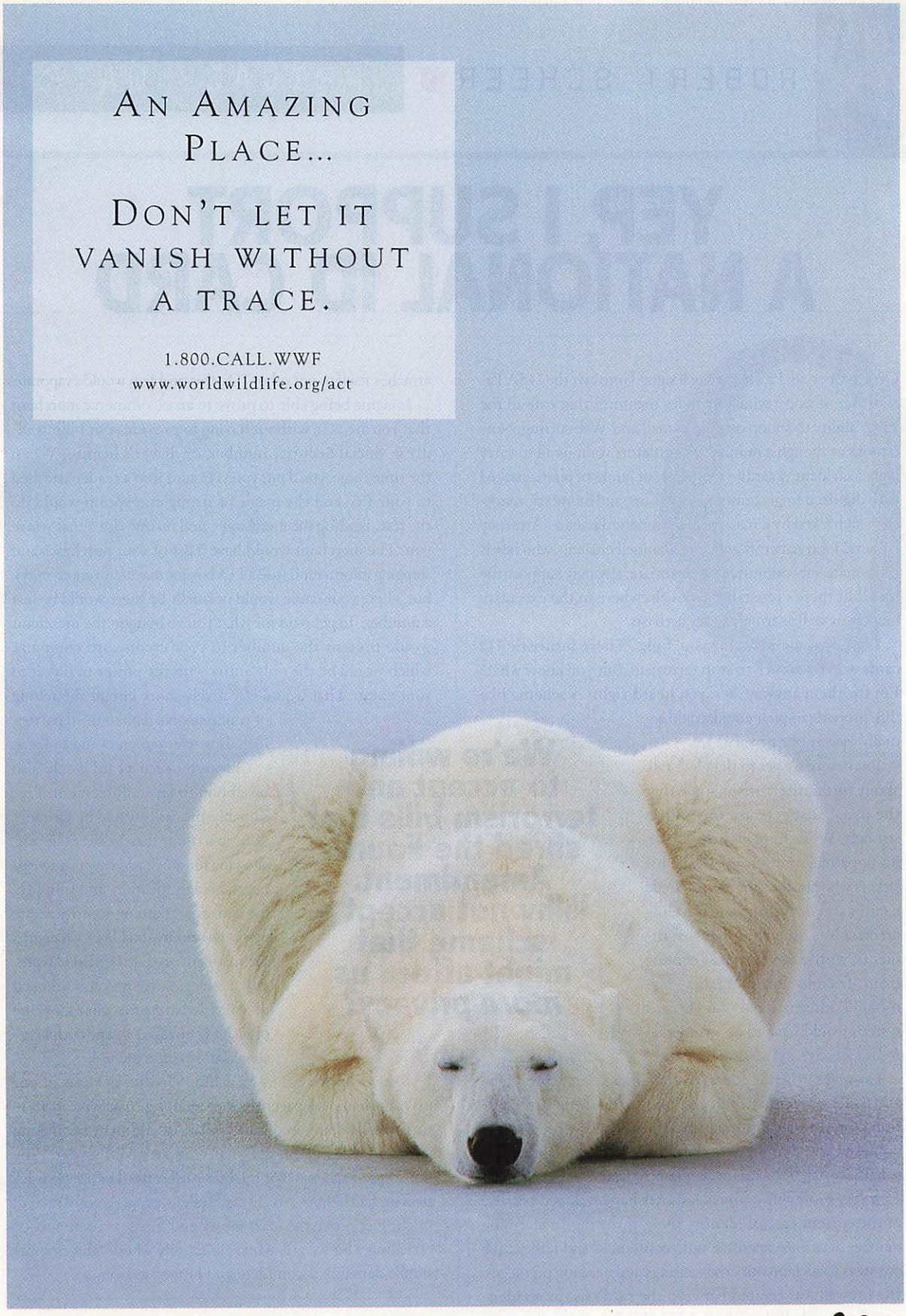
Links hurt if they cause unwelcome traffic to the site to which you're linking. For example, because of the curious workings of HTML, it's possible to display something on your site that's sitting on the server of another site. That means that when someone sees it on your page, you're creating traffic for that other server. If it happens too often, it can cost that server money, since most Web hosts charge additional fees if a site exceeds its monthly traffic allotment. Basically, you should never present someone else's Web content as your own. If you want to use other sites' pictures on your site, send them a note asking permission. Oh, and always give them credit for the image, plus a link back to their site if they want one.

Links can also be harmful if they divert traffic from a site. Years ago, Microsoft and Ticketmaster squabbled when Microsoft linked to a number of TM pages without permission. The ticketing giant claimed that the software giant was costing them revenue by "deep linking" people directly to ticketing pages, bypassing all the banner ads they would normally have seen along the way. Eventually the two companies bitch-slapped each other through the courts and into a settlement. Some site owners (usually big corporate ones trying to sell ads) are still touchy about anyone entering through anything but the front door.

Generally, however, it's okay to make a check-out-this-cool-site link from your personal Web pages. Big sites generally don't care, and little sites are usually pleased to hear from a fan. Find an e-mail address for the site proprietor and ask. If you don't hear back, assume you've got the all-clear. Just don't give them a lot of traffic or take a lot of traffic away. Got that? ■

Right? Wrong? Write: angela_gunn@ziffdavis.com

JAY GULLIXSON



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ROBERT SCHEER ■ PRIVACY WATCH

YEP, I SUPPORT A NATIONAL ID CARD

On October 26, President Bush signed into law the USA Patriot Act of 2001, which includes measures that extend the FBI's ability to snoop on your e-mail and Web surfing. Now it looks as though a number of legislators want us all to carry high-tech identity cards—tamperproof hunks of plastic packed with digitized fingerprints, retinal scans, and biometric markers—all backed by a massive government database. Attorney General John Ashcroft and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who heads the Senate subcommittee on terrorism, strongly support the idea, but there's resistance from elsewhere in the executive branch, as well as from privacy activists.

I've got some news for you, folks: These futuristic ID cards won't do much to stop terrorism. But you know what? I'm for them anyway. Yes, you heard right: A scheme like this, properly implemented, could actually *enhance* our privacy.

But before we get to that, let's talk about this antiterrorism angle that the usual suspects are touting so strongly. While it might help a little, it's not a real solution. All of the hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center and Pentagon were traveling on passports issued by other governments, with more than half coming from "friendly" Saudi Arabia. Terrorism is international—an ID card system would have to be worldwide to be effective in fighting it.

However, when it comes to such increasingly problematic issues as identity theft and online fraud—not to mention domestic law enforcement—an ID card with a purely domestic scope could be an invaluable addition to our personal security, both financial and physical.

A very profitable criminal industry has developed because of the current ease of identity theft, throwing an alarming number of us into expensive, time-consuming, and Kafkaesque odysseys to reclaim our credit ratings and banking privileges. If a firewall was created between the card's use as an identity check and all the other personal information that now attaches itself to our other IDs, this problem would evaporate.

Imagine being able to prove to an e-commerce merchant that you are you, without having to provide your billing address, Social Security number, or driver's license. When the time came, you'd put your ID card into a reader attached to your PC, and the magic of strong encryption would do the rest, assuring the merchant—and no one else—that you're you. The merchant would have a list of your purchases and shipping information (use a P.O. box for maximum anonymity), but where your name would normally be there would be just a number. To get paid for what you've bought, the merchant would present the number to your credit card company, which would be the only entity with the power to link it to your name. That would effectively short-circuit the selling of your personal data to third parties, including telemarketers and stalkers.

We're willing to accept antiterrorism bills that shred the Fourth Amendment. Why not accept a scheme that might afford us *more* privacy?

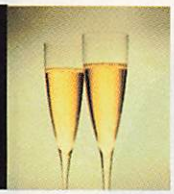
Obviously, such a card would also be a boon to law enforcement. Presumably, the cards would be far more difficult to forge than a driver's license, allowing for quick and easy positive or negative identification, and simplifying and strengthening security at airports and sensitive buildings. Of course, such a system needs to be planned carefully, and legislative precautions need to be enacted to guard against the abuse of such a centralized and powerful personal information cache.

Today's world requires a willing sacrifice of some of our privacy rights. Apparently we're willing to accept antiterrorism bills that shred the Fourth Amendment by making it legal to read or scan all e-mail without a court order. Why not accept a scheme that might actually afford us *more* privacy than we had before? An ID card system, properly constructed, might just prove the least messy and most accurate way of revealing who we are, when—and only when—the circumstance demands a complete and honest answer. ■

Aseem Batra [aseembatra@hotmail.com] contributed to this column.

BLAKE LITTLE

MODERN HUMORIST'S NET YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS



Resolved: Read more. Get in shape. And make money from home!

January 1, 2002

— I resolve to check my amihotornot.com rankings no more than three times a day.

— I resolve to no longer Google all potential dates.

— I resolve to stop visiting XXX porn sites. In the future I will visit only XX sites.

— I resolve to spend less time in chatrooms. That time would be better spent instant messaging.

— I resolve to follow up on that "Make Money From Home" e-mail I keep receiving.

— I resolve to stop taking negative eBay feedback personally. They're just jealous of my vintage lunch-box collection.

— I resolve to start buying CDs again so that hardworking, talented artists like Staind and 'N Sync can get ripped off by record companies instead of by me.

— I resolve to download only MP3s of songs I already own on cassette, even though this means limiting my MP3 selection to Ratt, Arrested Development, and Wang Chung.

— I resolve to shift my entire stock portfolio into e-businesses. Nowhere to go but up, baby!

— I resolve to finally build a fan page devoted to plucky Olympic champion Misty Hyman.

— I resolve to find a way to retrieve that one new message that seems to wait for me at the top of certain sites. It's been very hard to get at, but I won't give up.

— I resolve to buy a Web cam. They're tiny and wireless!

— I resolve to find a buyer on eBay for my Star Wars ice planet Hoth adventure set who will meet my $115 reserve, as I have kept it in pristine condition.

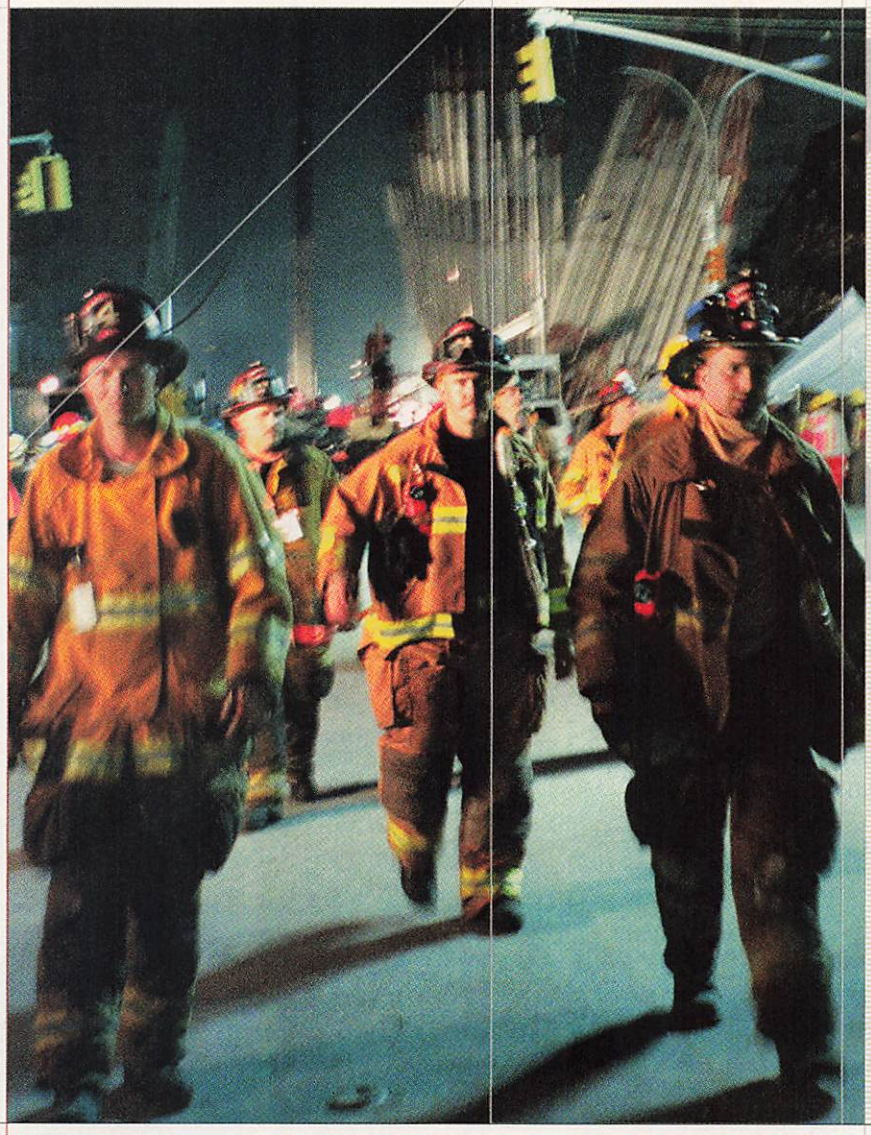
— I resolve to recover removable jet pack belonging to Boba Fett figure in said play set. Jet pack thought to be lost in fit of youthful exuberance. (Sandbox?)

— Finally, I resolve to use the Web as a forum for the open exchange of ideas, a facilitator of global communication, and the most efficient marketplace ever. And not just as a XX porn paradise.

Daily humor magazine Modern Humorist's new book is *Rough Draft: Pop Culture the Way It Almost Was* [modernhumorist.com/roughdraft].

TOP OF THE

OUR PICKS It was a tough and incredible year. Here are the tough and incredible people, sites, and events that took us through it all, reflecting the Net's growth and evolution



EVENT OF THE YEAR 9/11

Challenger blew up and the country kept going. Kennedy died in Dallas and the country kept going. The stock market crashed; Lincoln slumped bloody in a Ford's Theatre box seat. The country kept going. That's what it does. After we pause and watch, aghast, and wonder how we'll ever move on from the horror, we do. This time, as we confronted a nation irrevocably changed, we faced our rage and sorrow with the Net at our side. E-mail and instant messaging were vital lifelines for those in and out of Manhattan and Washington, D.C. News sites and personal Web diaries offered an intense range of information and analysis. Reaction across a global medium was never so immediate—or so maddening, accessible, or important.

SITE OF THE YEAR The Internet Archive Wayback Machine [web.archive.org]

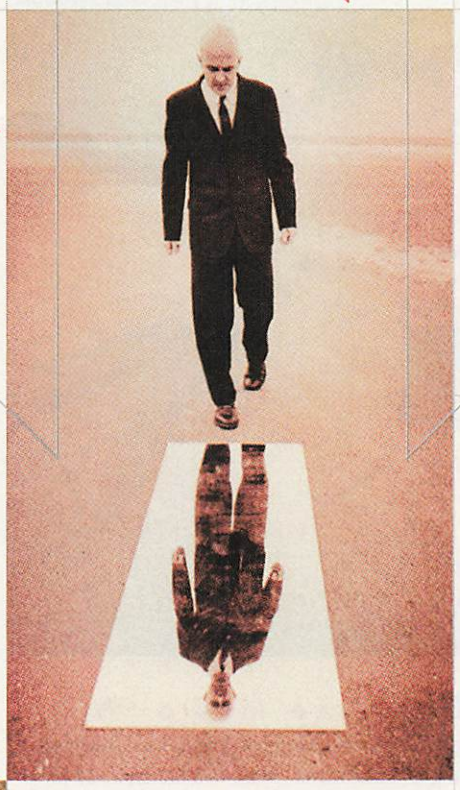
We can't stop reliving that day, in video footage and in our nightmares, over and over. To preserve the vast amount of online data created after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, the Library of Congress, **WebArchivist.org** and the Internet Archive saved a copy of every available Web page covering the attacks and put together the Wayback Machine's September 11 collection. Weighing in at more than 5 terabytes (that's 5 million megabytes) of material, this free digital library will provide a permanent record for future surfers and scholars seeking to reconstruct the day.

NET 2001

COVER STORY

PERSON OF THE YEAR You▸

John and Jane Does of the Net, take a bow. When the pundits and venture capitalists said the Net boom was over, you ignored them even more thoroughly than when they'd said buying cat food online was a good idea. Actually, your personal use of the Net has heated up. And you're a more diverse crew than ever: Four out of five American kids were using the Internet in 2001, as were 15 percent of the country's senior citizens and two-thirds of U.S. small businesses. But you weren't perfect. Far too many of you are more interested in sending cheesy e-cards and forwarding bad jokes than in keeping an eye on the political issues that protect your Net access. Nonetheless, in the past few years, good common sense hasn't been rewarded nearly enough when it comes to things Netty. This one's for you.



FIREFIGHTERS: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; ASHCROFT: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; BUSINESSMAN: BETSIE VAN DER MEER/GETTYONE

◂FIGHT OF THE YEAR Privacy vs. Security

In this corner: Attorney General John Ashcroft, the intelligence community, hundreds of skittish congressional critters eager to do something, and the fear that, even if the Internet and cryptography *weren't* used in the last attack, they're bound to be part of the next one. In that corner: Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.), the Electronic Frontier Foundation, hundreds of experts who question the ability and usefulness of any currently existing online security technology, and a couple of sections of the Constitution. Referee: the Supremes, eventually. The mat: your freedom. No matter who wins, it's going to take a trampling.

VILLAIN OF THE YEAR Virus Writers

This was the year we started looking at our mail very closely, both online and off. While e-mail viruses might be less life-threatening than anthrax, they nevertheless made a mess that cost Net users well over $11 billion. We'd say these digital hellions showed more skill than sense, except that most of them didn't reflect any skill, either. The class of 2001 virus writers were, more often than not, "script kiddies" using prewritten virus programs to cook up their little annoyances. Why? To prove their *133t sk1llz?* (That's hackerese for "elite skills.") To make a statement about social injustice? To strike a blow against big, bad Microsoft? No. They did it for the same reason that their parents egged the neighbor's house on Halloween when they were young. Problem is, it's extremely difficult to take $11 billion out of someone's allowance.

'01

TREND OF THE YEAR Weblogs

If this is the year of the average Joe, big props to his soapbox: the weblog. Known as blogs, these do-it-yourself online diaries are arguably the easiest way to make a wave in the Web's ocean. Feeling really lazy? Type your profound thoughts into a ready-made blog form; a site such as **Blogger [blogger.com]** or **Pitas.com** will build a Web page and put it online for you. The snobs of the Web world might think less of blogs for being so clearly and unabashedly labors of love. But with a galaxy of participants weighing in—from high-school students to professional writers and artists—blogging supplied the Net with the freshest voices of the year.

TECH OF THE YEAR (YOURS) E-Mail

The Internet's original killer app turned 30 sometime in October. Fittingly enough for a humble workhorse of a technology, e-mail's father, Ray Tomlinson, doesn't remember exactly when the first message was sent. Nor does he remember exactly what it said. (We personally suspect that it was spam hawking cheap rubber-stamp pads.) In 2001, hundreds of millions of e-mail addresses exchanged a simply unthinkable number of messages. And though not every one carried the poignancy of September 11 's raft of "Are you OK?" and "oh my God" messages, we wouldn't trade e-mail for any of the Net's glitzier realms. Bonus: Attachments may carry viruses, but no one's yet found a way to enclose powders.

TECH OF THE YEAR (THEIRS) Surveillance

Through the month of August, increased concern about online privacy kept surveillance advocates on the run. The government's Carnivore monitoring system drew gales of protest from technology experts and civil libertarians, while much attention was focused on what businesses might be doing with consumers' all-important purchasing information. That was then. These days, no one's talking much about buyers' rights. In the weeks since September 11, surveillance advocates have made astonishing gains (at the expense of constitutional rights, according to privacy watchdogs and civil libertarians), with little or no evidence that the gathered information will be handled responsibly or analyzed effectively. Will collecting masses of raw data on every Net user actually protect anyone from anything? The tech community is doubtful, but it's hard to make oneself heard during a stampede.

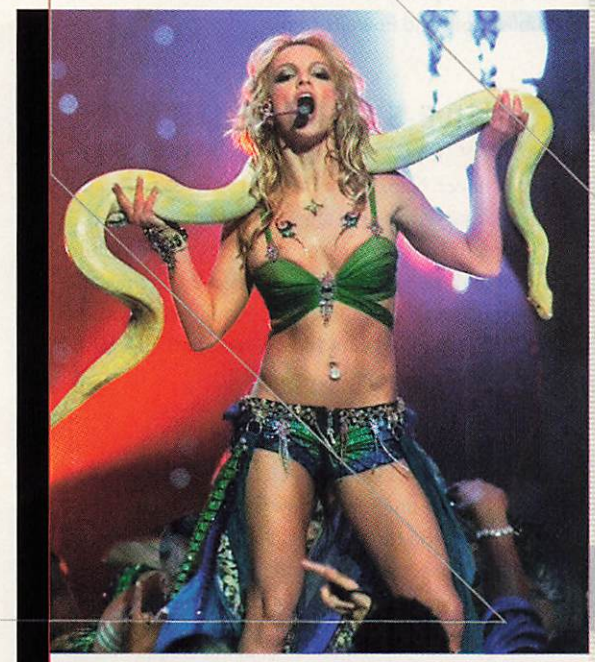
SURVIVOR OF THE YEAR Free Music

As Metallica, Hilary Rosen, and the Recording Industry Association of America led the charge against Napster, the poster child for file-sharing and free music, those who understood how the Internet and its people work sat back and laughed. Sure, the courts might be able to pummel a service that was silly enough to tell them where it lived and who was in charge, but what can they do about programs without a central authority? When Napster was forced to regulate itself, its copycats gained a dividend: vast numbers of displaced users. Now, instead of having all the troublemakers in one place, where they could more easily be reprogrammed into paying for their music, all of us—uh, we mean all of *you*—music-sharing roaches scurried under different pieces of kitchen furniture, becoming that much more difficult to find. And while Hilary hasn't given up the fight (not by a long shot), the lack of a central brand is making free music harder than ever to fight. In the meantime, sites such as Audiogalaxy, LimeWire, Kazaa, and BearShare continue letting the music flow freely.

NAILE GOELBASI/GETTYONE

'01 TOP OF THE CHARTS

YOUR PICKS: Amid the most searched-for, watched, and read are some familiar names, places, and faces—and a few eyebrow-raisers



THE MOST SEARCHED-FOR NAMES OF THE YEAR*

Britney Spears The pop-music princess is now a three-time Most Searched-For Female celeb.

Eminem The controversial rapper gets male-celeb props for the second consecutive year.

Nostradamus After September 11, surfers flocked to Google and AOL seeking prophetic verses, making his name 2001's fastest-rising search term.

What *would* Nostradamus say?

In the year of the island city's calamity
When the people seek truth in elevens
Two volatile stars will emerge again
As pinnacles sought by the masses.

One, whose false twin towers doth
Provoke the doleful one to priapic joy;
T'other that melteth in the mouth
Yet in the hand remaineth whole.

But yea, an ancient prophet shall rise up
With verses that confuse yet tantalize
He shall usurp the thrones of false royalty
Who hypnotize the masses with their dross.**

*Picking the Most Searched-for: We asked the major portals—AltaVista, Google, Lycos, AOL, and Yahoo! Buzz Index—to report their top search terms for the year. Names placing first on the majority of sites won the category.
**We're *kidding*. This is a made-up, would-be prophecy. Not really by Nostradamus. Sorry.

TIMELINE

JANUARY

IN THE FIRST CASE OF its kind, a virtual carnage takes place among Diablo II gamers: Hackers infiltrate the community and execute legions of hard-earned wizards and warriors.

AFTER 366 DAYS OF using solely the Net to get food, other essentials, and entertainment, **DotComGuy** emerges from his Dallas apartment. Sponsor offers were generous; whether the backers paid up remains unclear.

FEBRUARY

DOT-COM DEATHWATCH, Part 782,839,920: eToys.com.

THE NAPSTER SAGA continues: A federal appeals court finds the free-music service guilty of copyright infringement.

TOP SITES The year's most-traveled Web sites

OVERALL
1 YAHOO! [yahoo.com]
2 MSN [msn.com]
3 AOL [aol.com]

NEWS/INFO
1 MSNBC [msnbc.com]
2 CNN.COM, WEATHER.COM (tie)
3 THE NEW YORK TIMES ON THE WEB [nytimes.com]

SPORTS
1 ESPN [espn.com]
2 CBS SPORTSLINE.COM [sportsline.com]
3 CNN SPORTS ILLUSTRATED [cnnsi.com]

MUSIC
1 REAL [real.com]
2 NAPSTER [napster.com]
3 WINDOWSMEDIA.COM

GAMES
1 MSN GAMES [zone.com]
2 EA.COM
3 POGO.COM

TRAVEL SALES
1 EXPEDIA.COM
2 TRAVELOCITY.COM
3 SOUTHWEST [southwest.com]

CAREER
1 MONSTER.COM
2 JOBSONLINE [jobsonline.com]
3 HOTJOBS [hotjobs.com]

PERSONAL FINANCE
1 MSN MONEY [moneycentral.com]
2 CBS.MARKETWATCH.COM
3 NEXTCARD [nextcard.com]

RETAIL
1 AMAZON.COM
2 AMERICANGREETINGS.COM
3 BIZRATE.COM

AUTO
1 KELLEY BLUE BOOK [kbb.com]
2 MSN CARPOINT [carpoint.com]
3 AUTOTRADER.COM

REAL ESTATE
1 REALTOR.COM
2 MSN HOMEADVISOR [homeadvisor.com]
3 HOMESTORE.COM sites

Y-Life compiled these lists using data from monthly Nielsen/NetRatings and Jupiter Media Metrix traffic reports (January through September 2001). Nielsen/NetRatings (now NetRatings) tracked, via its proprietary technology, the surfing habits of 70,000 home and office users. Jupiter tracked, via random-sampling surveys, site visits of 60,000 home and office users.

SPEARS: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; NOSTRADAMUS: CHRIS HELLIER/CORBIS; EMINEM: JAMES K. BURNS/RETNA; DOTCOMGUY: DANNY TURNER

TIMELINE

Thus begins the site's long, tortuous descent into corporate ownership and increasing irrelevance.

MARCH

THE **EBAY** AUDIENCE grows by 4 million, to 22.13 million visitors, in March—nudging out **Amazon.com** by about 50,000 users—according to Nielsen/NetRatings.

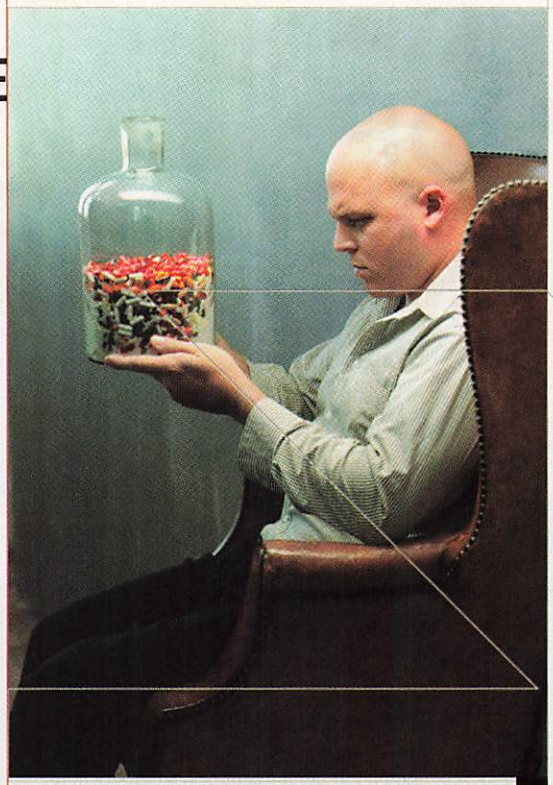
MADONNA'S BANNED-from-MTV *What It Feels Like for a Girl* video finds a new and popular life on the Net via an exclusive AOL Webcast deal.

A **SOTHEBYS.COM** auction of Marilyn Monroe memorabilia, including a typed letter from the White House thanking her for an appearance at President John F. Kennedy's birthday party, draws $417,478 in the site's three-week, online-only event.

APRIL

DOT-COM DEATHWATCH, Part 996,001,724: Kozmo.com.

AFTER BEING SOLD—sorry, *brokered*—twice through an online adoption agency (once to a British



TOP PRESCRIPTION Propecia

Viagra may hold a special place in men's medicine cabinets, but it was Propecia, a popular weapon in the fight against male pattern baldness, that beat out all other prescriptions at **Drugstore.com**, the Web's most popular pharmacy stop.

TOP NEWS EVENT 9.11.01

At **CNN.com**, traffic increased 680 percent in the 48 hours following the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C.; its 11.7 million surfers made it the most-visited news site of the crisis. **ABCNews.com**, **CBS News [cbsnews.com]**, **Fox News Channel [foxnews.com]**, and **MSNBC [msnbc.com]** also reported the event as the most-trafficked of the year.

TOP LIVE WEBCAST U2 at Notre Dame University

The fighting Irish yielded the field to the singing Irish on October 10. Bono and the boys played to a sold-out stadium and 5 million surfers watching at **Real [real.com]**, **U2.com**, and **Tiscali [tiscali.it]**.

TOP DOWNLOAD ICQ

It's chock-full of arcane commands and looks like the control panel of a nuclear reactor. Yet AOL's ICQ instant-messaging program, the geeky sibling of AOL Instant Messenger, took top billing at Download.com and HotFiles.com. (AOL would not comment on AIM download figures at **AOL [aol.com]**.)

TOP PALM CHANNEL The Wall Street Journal

They need their news and they need it now—in the palms of their hands: Street-savvy surfers chose the *Journal* most at **AvantGo [avantgo.com]**. Now if only the market could get this active again.

TOP E-BOOK AUTHOR James Patterson (*Roses Are Red* and *1st to Die*)

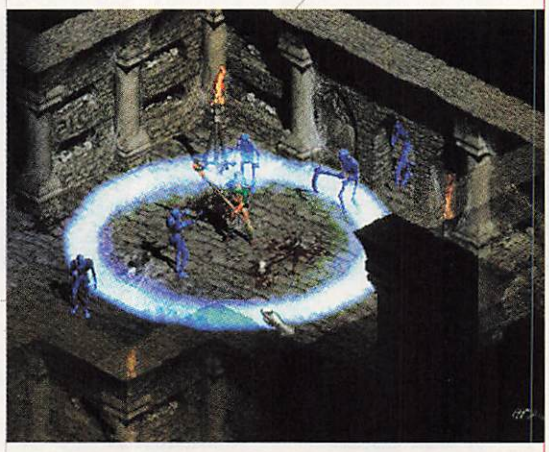
Thriller novelist James Patterson knocks reigning e-book champion Stephen King from the perch, topping the online-best-seller lists at both **iPublish.com** and **Powells.com**.

TOP FILE-SHARING SITE Audiogalaxy [audiogalaxy.com]

Peer-to-peer pioneer Napster started out the year as an untouchable juggernaut. But after a June court order blocked 90 percent of its music roster, dejected audiophiles turned to this new Web-based service. By October, the upstart had racked up more than 26 million downloads at **CNET: Download.com [download.com]** and **ZDNet Downloads [zdnet.com/downloads]**.

TOP AUCTION SALE Gulfstream II jet

After unveiling a new aviation category over the summer, eBay trafficked its highest-selling item ever on August 16: a luxury 12-passenger Gulfstream II jet. It fetched $4.9 million from an African charter company.



TOP MULTIPLAYER GAME Diablo II Expansion Set: Lord of Destruction

In Diablo II, Satan lets loose in a medieval realm and there's hell to pay. Game publisher Blizzard Entertainment scored a huge hit with this expansion pack. It was the best-selling multiplayer adventure of 2001, and the second-best-selling game of the year (topped only by Maxis' The Sims).

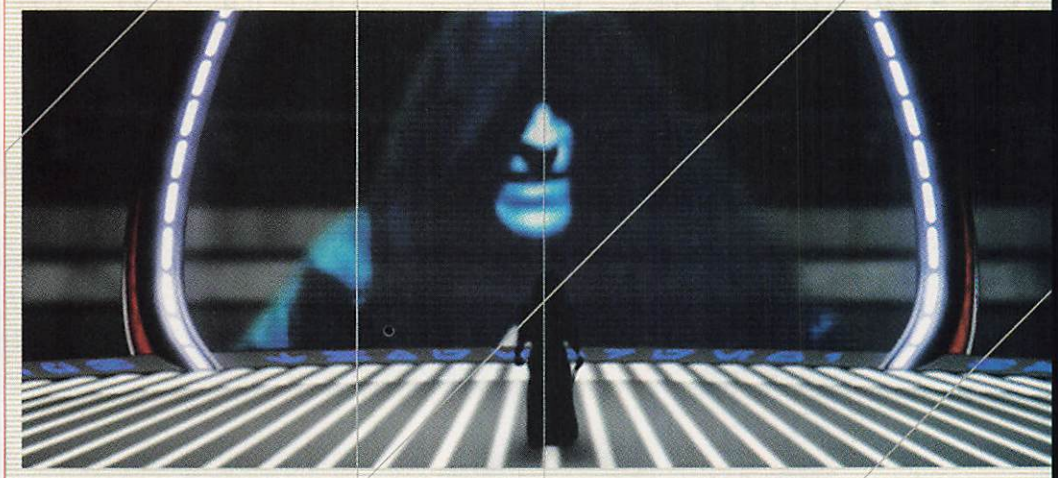
MADONNA: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; MAN WITH PILLS: JEFF STEPHENS; DIABLO II: COURTESY BLIZZARD.COM

MOST DOWNLOADED BAND

They Might Be Giants Fans have driven the quirky New York band's monthly single-cut releases to the top of the ratings heap again at **Emusic [emusic.com]**.

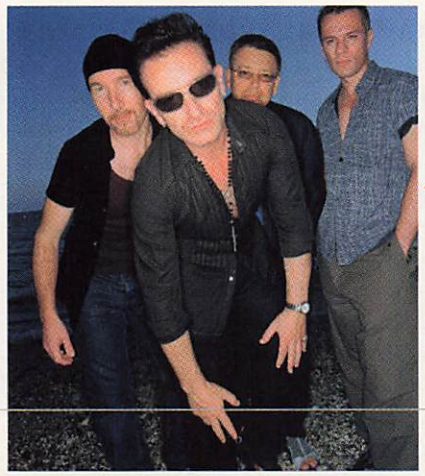
TOP RADIO STATION

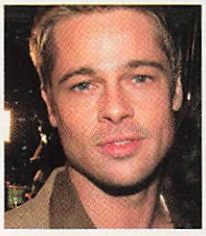
The '80s Hits show "Karma Chameleon." "99 Luft Balloons." "Come on Eileen." We thought Moby had led us beyond the era of bad synthesizers and worse hair. But NetRadio listeners proved everyone wrong, spending nearly 2 million hours of listening time on this retro-minded station. Unfortunately, though, it seems that overwhelming support isn't enough to keep you afloat these days—its parent company, NetRadio.com, bit the dust in October.



TOP ONLINE SHORT FILM

Duality Die-hard *Star Wars* fans Mark Thomas and Dave Macomber directed this mesmerizing, computer-generated homage, part of the **iFilm [ifilm.com]** library, in which a Sith apprentice is tested in the dark arts of Jedi combat. Get in on the nastiness at **Duality [www.crewoftwo.com]**.





U2: RANKIN/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA; PITT AND ROBERTS: KEVIN WINTER/IMAGE DIRECT; NAKEDNEWS GUY: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

TOP CHATS

Celebrity gab sessions on the Web were at one time a shoo-in for high ratings. But these days, surfers have their sights on headlines, too. This eclectic mix of chats and news events rose above the small talk at the Web's most talkative venues.

◂ **MTV Video Music Awards**
September 6, **MTV.com**, where performers included the band U2

Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt
February 18, **AOL [aol.com]**

Peter Bergen: "Osama bin Laden and the Hijackers' Identities"
September 14, **CNN.com**

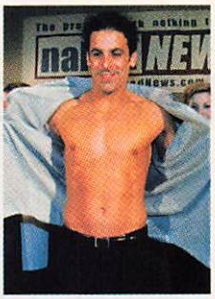
"America on Alert: A Town Hall Meeting"
September 16, **MSNBC [msnbc.com]**

O-Town
June 15, **Yahoo! Chat [chat.yahoo.com]**

THE TOP OF THE CHARTS TEAM: Meaghan O'Neill, Rob Bernstein

TIMELINE

couple for $12,000), 10-month-old twins Kiara and Keyara Wecker are returned to St. Louis and placed in state custody.



AFTER YEARS OF Webcasting daily news reports by nude anchorwomen, **Naked News** introduces its first male anchor.

THE NBA WEBCASTS A full game for the first time: the Sacramento Kings vs. the Dallas Mavericks.

THE SAGA OF **SEX.COM**, arguably the Web's most valuable URL, ends with a $65 million judgment in favor of its current owner, Gary Kremen, who uses it to host a sex-oriented portal and search engine.

MAY

REACTING TO A CHINESE jet fighter's April collision with a U.S. surveillance plane (and the ensuing international crisis), hackers from both countries declare a May Day cyberwar. The "Honker Union of China" takes credit for the defacing of 1,000 sites, including those of MCI and the U.S. Departments of Labor and Energy, in response to American hacker attacks.

'01 TALK OF THE NET

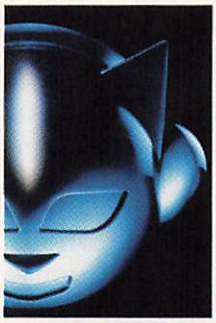
PICS AND CLICKS Yes, it was a sobering year, but that didn't stop mirth and mischief online

TIMELINE

IN A WIDE-RANGING sweep of online porn, Yahoo! removes links to some of its adult-themed clubs, message boards, and chatrooms.

AS DOT-COMS CONTINUE their downward spiral, the film *Startup.com*, an indie documentary, captures the frustrations of former tech zillionaires at GovWorks.com.

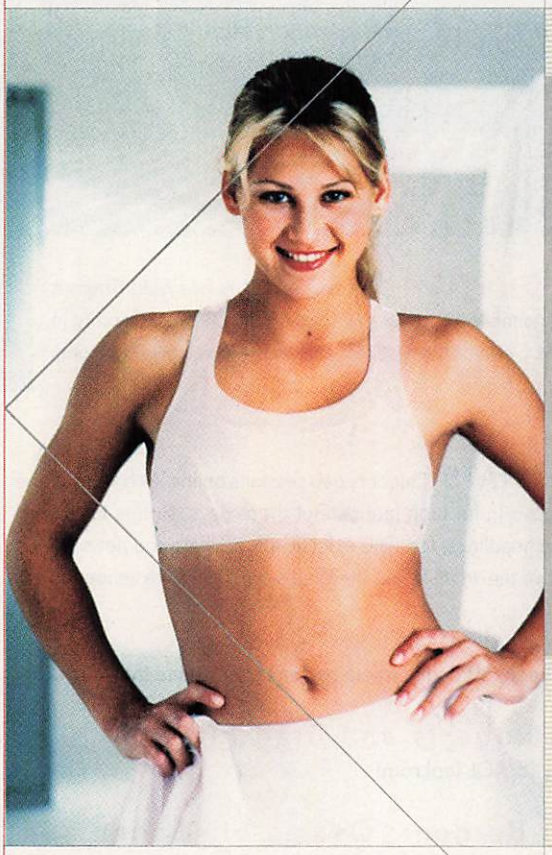
THE EXECUTION OF convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh won't be broadcast online after all. A federal judge rejects a request by Entertainment Network, sponsor of such controversial sites as **Voyeurdorm.com**. The network was planning to charge viewers $1.95 for the Webcast.



JUNE

THE NAPSTER SAGA: THE reeling site surrenders its

So much for that bridge to the 21st century Shortly after George W. Bush's inauguration, **The White House [whitehouse.gov]** remained under construction (with "Insert Something Meaningful Here" in place of one headline). Later, fearing pesky future open-records requests, the president announced that he would swear off e-mail completely.



You had us at "upskirt"

Tennis star Anna Kournikova found herself in the spotlight when one fan created the harmless but annoying Anna worm, an e-mail with an attachment containing an alleged new, sexy shot of the Russian siren. "She deserves some attention, doesn't she?" wrote Jan "OnTheFly" Dewit, the e-mail infector, on a now-defunct Tripod site in February. Kournikova later signed a $10 million endorsement deal with Lycos, presumably to promote the company's special all-the-viruses-you-can-eat offer.

Am I running this half-baked, time-wasting device into the ground or not? Am I Hot or Not? was funny. So was Am I a Geek or Not? And Modern Humorist's Monkey Hot or Not? But Am I a Clone of My Father or Not? Am I a Gay Puerto Rican Making Out With a Clown or Not? Am I a Bad Televangelist Hair Wearing Dork or Not? If you're enjoying this, visit **Am I This or Not? [iamcal.com/ami/list.php]**.

Def Leppard: Internet visionaries In early March, a court order gave the Napster song-swapping service a nearly fatal blow: Ban 135,000 copyrighted songs. However, once the order was applied, vigilante downloaders circumvented the filters on the service by creating hard-to-sniff-out MP3s, such as the misspelled "Jayded" by Arrowsmith. Napster's sympathetic peer, Aimster, even posted a "pig" encoder, which renames "Madonna—Music" as "adonnaM—usicM."

TALK OF THE NET TEAM: Scott Alexander, Ron Bel Bruno, Bilge Ebiri (editors); Steve Knopper (writer)

KOURNIKOVA: CAPITAL PICTURES/RETNA; NAPSTER: DAVIES + STARR

Pickleddog.com, you're next! In February, the parody site **Bonsai Kitten [bonsaikitten.com]**, which posts photos of felines squashed into Mason jars and gives instructions on how to get them in there, got busted for these fictional misdeeds. Before realizing that few cats are obedient enough to stay in their jars for long, the FBI sent a warning letter to the site's webmaster, "Dr. Michael Wong Chang," and a subpoena to M.I.T., its original campus host.

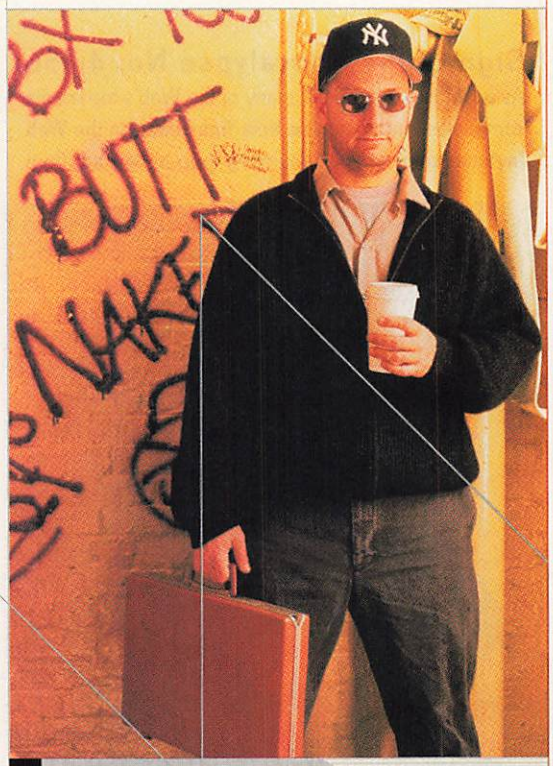
As if we needed proof, Josh After losing his job, bad-boy Pseudo.com founder Josh Harris and his girlfriend, Tanya Corrin, aimed Web cams at the shower, the bed, and everything else in their New York City loft for a 100-day experiment called **We Live in Public [weliveinpublic.com]**. On Day 85, Tanya split, posting a 2,700-word screed on F---ed Company's Web site entitled "My ex-boyfriend sucks and here's the proof."

Which comes first, :) or ;)? In June, the online *Oxford English Dictionary* added *FAQ, http, homepage, search engine, spam,* and *snail mail.* In July, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* added *MP3* and *e-book* to its latest edition. We're still waiting for *d00d, l33t,* and *warez.*

But then he got this really great deal for 700 free hours... Representative Joel Hefley (R-Colo.) held out bravely until late January as the final congressperson without a Web page.

We're sure she received her .001 cut of the action anyway A harmless Nike shoe promotion went sour when Jonah Peretti, an M.I.T. graduate student, requested that the word *sweatshop* be branded on his personalized sneakers in January. **Nike [nike.com]**, which sponsored the $10-per-pair customization gimmick, politely declined. So Peretti forwarded the entire e-mail exchange—which included his request for "a snapshot of the 10-year-old Vietnamese girl who makes my shoes"—to the Net at large.

Yet another case in which a simple emoticon just won't do "Why are you late? You are divorced" was the mobile-phone text message a United Arab Emirates man sent his wife of two years. The words were enough, under Islamic Sharia law, to end the marriage. (He changed his mind two hours later; the couple remains together.) In a related development, a female politician asked Malaysian government officials not to validate such high-tech divorce declarations.



Reason No. 4,976 why it's unlikely that Josh Harris will ever get a date again

"Googling," the act of plugging the names of prospective mates into the **Google [google.com]** search engine, emerged this year as crucial dating insurance. Unconfirmed reports of "counter-Googling"—the act of creating Web pages containing a bibliography of your would-be 27 best-selling novels, photos of your flawless eight-pack abs, and video clips of your spiritual confab with the Dalai Lama—followed almost immediately.

TIMELINE

independence by establishing partnerships with three corporate record labels: Warner, EMI, and BMG. These bedfellows announce plans to launch a music-subscription service by July—and then the plans get postponed until 2002.

DOT-COM DEATHWATCH, Part 1,568,100,221: Suck and Feed magazines.

AOL'S SUBSCRIBER population reaches 27 million—over three times the population of Bulgaria.

THE PHANTOM EDIT, AN anonymous filmmaker's Jar Jar-free reshuffling of ***Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace***, circulates online in video form.

JULY

DOT-COM DEATHWATCH, Part 1,906,237,708: Webvan.

YET MORE NAPSTER: With the site in virtual hibernation, Metallica settles its copyright-infringement suit.

AUGUST

IN A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE against online movie-swapping services, five major film studios announce plans to offer

NIKE: HUGH PATRICK BROWN/TIMEPIX; HARRIS: GEORGE LANGE; *PHANTOM MENACE*: NEWSCOM

TIMELINE

downloadable feature films for rent. When? "Soon," they say.

ONCE A SMART AND snarky ace of the dot-com media biz, ***The Industry Standard*** shutters its doors after a long malaise. The magazine lays off most of its remaining employees as its parent company files for Chapter 11.

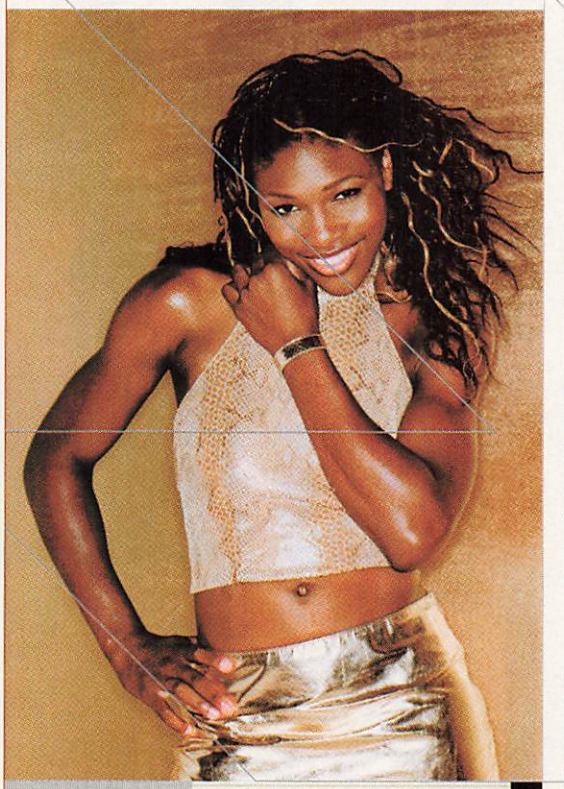
SEPTEMBER

MICROSOFT'S MSN Network claims 6.9 million users, up from 6.4 million in April. The software giant credits the jump to its aggressive luring of users from rival AOL.

AFTER TERRORISTS FLY planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, people worldwide communicate via e-mail when phone lines become overloaded. Surfers flood the Net for updates on the crisis, driving traffic at **CNN.com** and other news sites to all-time highs. In the weeks that follow, millions gather on message boards and in chatrooms to comfort, console, and talk about whether life will ever be "normal" again.

But really, there's no need to make it a popularity contest Welcome to the Battle of the Networked Viruses. At press time, the SirCam virus, which transforms random files from a surfer's hard drive into virus bombs and e-mails them to the person's entire address book, had infected 2.3 million computers, leading the pack of digital deviants. The Nimda worm, which made its debut days after the September 11 attacks, placed second with 1.3 million, while the much-hyped Code Red virus floundered at a mere 250,000 systems blighted.

Sign of the Apocalypse No. 4,356 As advertising dwindled, many of the Web's top media companies—including **The New York Times on the Web [nytimes.com]**—began accepting "pop-under" ads from digital-camera company **X10 [x10.com]**, featuring beautiful smiling women and pictures of a tiny spy camera. Because the ads loaded in a separate window whose content came from X10's site, the ad campaign catapulted the e-tailer to fourth place in Jupiter Media Metrix's overall Web traffic report.



This just in: Rich, spoiled stars like to shop Tennis star Serena Williams, 19, owned up to a Net shopping habit. "It hit its worst at the French Open," she said in August. "I wasn't able to stop and I bought, bought, bought, bought, bought"—specifically, clothes, shoes, and dog toys.

She remains at large, and dangerously un-Google-able After **Psycho-Ex [psychoexgirlfriend.com]** "audio journal," with its 50 histrionic and profane voice mails from the webmaster's frustrated ex, became the stuff of summer Web buzz, many deemed the whole thing a cynical hoax. Okay, let's assume it was, and that the guy (better known as "theguy") made it all up. That would mean he had to find a friend (or pay an actress) depressed enough to deliver a convincing heavy sigh and declare, "I gotta do something before I end up killing myself over this. My health is in jeopardy and I'm sure you're aware of that. I want to hear from you." This is stranger than fiction.

Now if we can just get them to forget about that whole "money" thing In March, as America Online rolled out unlimited access in the U.K., its offices there "banned time" by covering up clocks and asking employees to remove their wristwatches. It was all part of a publicity stunt to help workers "experience the value of time without limits."

Don't let this small band of fanatics tarnish a great and peace-loving faith A group of e-mail petitioners in England insisted that U.K. census-takers count adherents of the Jedi "religion." They got their wish in October, when the faith was granted its own response code in the census process.

From the "sick Net tricks we wish had been a hoax" collection Paul Morgan, aka Freck, a disabled 33-year-old from Mississippi, claimed that on November 30 he would Webcast the amputation of his feet via guillotine at **Freck's New Feet [cutoffmyfeet.com]**. By charging $20 per view for the spectacle, he hoped to raise enough money for prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation.

GLENN CLOSE: FOTO FANTASIES; WILLIAMS: GEORGE HOLZ PHOTOGRAPHY/CORBIS OUTLINE

If all the press releases we got in our in-box this year turned out to be true...

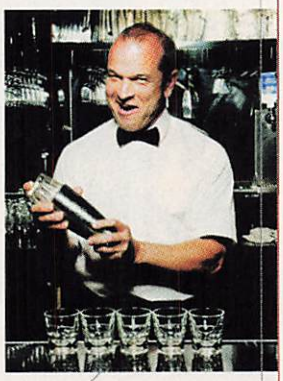
One fine day next year, while reading **MSNBC [msnbc.com]** on London's first wired park bench, I check **The Official U.S. Time [nist.time.gov]** with my new AOL Time Warner Swatch—and remember that my flight to New York is about to take off! So I hop into a rented Volkswagen Golf eGeneration, confirm the flight time via dashboard mini-computer, and make it to my American Airlines jet, where I use my eyeglass-mounted display to consult **Weather.com**. Ten hours later, **NY-Taxi.com** helps me hail a cab wirelessly from Starbucks. In Manhattan, the interactive **Bloomingdale's [bloomingdales.com]** window insists I buy one of its Top 10 Gifts Under $100. So, of course, I do (as mandated by law), and then I walk home, munching on some delicious Soylent Green.

And the Nobel Prize for breakfast preparation goes to... The world's first Web cam, trained on a coffee machine so Cambridge University scientists would not hike down the stairs only to find an empty pot, closed down in March after 10 years. Perhaps in tribute, an engineer at nearby Brunel University invented a "Java toaster," which dials a phone number, obtains the weather forecast, and burns icons for "sunny," "cloudy" or "rainy" onto the bread.

Strangely, no *.broke*, *.rip*, or *.doa*
In an effort to provide more online real estate, the Web contorted in July to make room for more domain names, including *.biz*, *.aero*, *.name*, *.coop* and *.info*.

What pants? Pop superstar Britney Spears showed the world that she is, indeed, familiar with four-letter words when a tape of her neurotic preconcert rant-

"What did you do in the dot-com crash, Daddy?"



"I created the Dot Goner." San Francisco-based Potrero Brewing Company's new drink consists of Southern Comfort, crème de cassis, orange juice, and soda water.

"I became a dominatrix." When Net magazines stopped hiring, "Natasha," a freelance writer interviewed in *Salon*, answered a "Female Actresses Wanted: Dommes and Femmes" ad.

"I created 'roll of shame' toilet paper, depicting ticker-tape stock reports from Yahoo!, Amazon, Webvan, and Drkoop.com." Entrepreneur John Zappa wrote the marketing slogan "No hype and all wipe."

"I played *Survivor* at work." Staffers at defunct U.K. dot-com Eezygoodies.com voted every Friday for layoff candidates; on subsequent Monday mornings, the British company's CEO tallied the ballots and acted accordingly.

"I joined the online porn industry." "We're getting all sorts of calls from technology headhunters asking if we have openings," Bert Manzari of DHD Media, an online adult entertainment company, told the *Los Angeles Times* in April.

TIMELINE

NIELSEN/NETRATINGS and Harris Interactive report e-commerce spendings of more than $4.7 billion in September, with 39 million Americans buying online—an all-time record.

A TEAM OF FRENCH AND American **surgeons** in New York, using robotics and videoconferencing technology, replaces the gallbladder of a woman in northeastern France.

AND JUST IN CASE YOU were feeling a bit starved for Napster news, the beleaguered file-trading service reaches a major agreement with music publishers and songwriters, thereby settling at least one nagging lawsuit.

OCTOBER

THE CRITICALLY LAUDED Net zine pioneer **Salon.com**, with its stock well below $1 per share, begins charging viewers for all news and political stories, as well as members-only erotic content.

MICROSOFT RELEASES its Windows XP operating system. Users are divided, with some claiming it invades privacy and will extend the company's monopoly, while others praise the system's stabil-

MSN BENCH: MICROSOFT; BARTENDER: SEAN MURPHY/GETTYONE; SURGERY: REUTERS/TIMEPIX

TIMELINE

ity, comprehensive features, and general user-friendliness.

THE ANTRAX WORM, AN e-mail virus designed to capitalize on the general anthrax panic in the U.S., fails its intended mission. Multiple errors by its author make it slow-spreading and easy to detect with virus-scanning software.

HAVING ANNOUNCED earlier in the year that he would release a new CD the old-fashioned way, **Prince/the Artist** changes his mind and releases *The Rainbow Children* online via his **NPG Music Club.**

MICROSOFT NETWORK (MSN) announces it will begin live audio Webcasts of National Hockey League games as part of an exclusive agreement with the league.

NOVEMBER

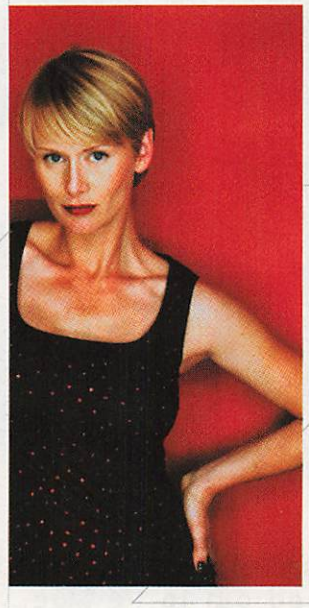
DOT-COM DEATHWATCH, Part 996,001,994: Disney's Mr. Showbiz.

MORE THAN 500,000 people purchase their Harry Potter tickets online at **Fandango.** It's

ing wound up on Napster. Among the *other* revelations: "Okay, let's hurry, y'all, seriously," and "This is retarded," and "Oh, my pants are too short!"

Luckily, comedian Yahoo Serious is still alive The great southern author Eudora Welty died at age 92 in July; programmers cited her short story "Why I Live at the P.O." as their inspiration for the Eudora e-mail software.

Next time, we'll make sure to ask for a doctor's note "It was like a million smiles were shining on me, and I wasn't afraid," read one passage Kaycee Nicole, 19, posted on the BWG Update while struggling with leukemia and chemotherapy. Hundreds of Net philanthropists responded—that is, until Kaycee turned out to be an elaborate hoax created by a Peabody, Kansas, mother-and-daughter team. Just goes to show you don't need a flawed business plan to create buzz online.



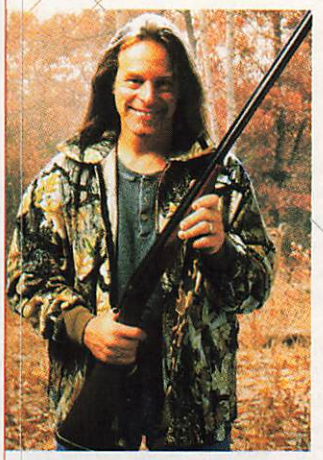
Haven't we learned *anything* from Dr. Laura Schlessinger? There's a saying: Sooner or later, everybody ends up naked on the Net. Proving it again this year were nude pictures of:

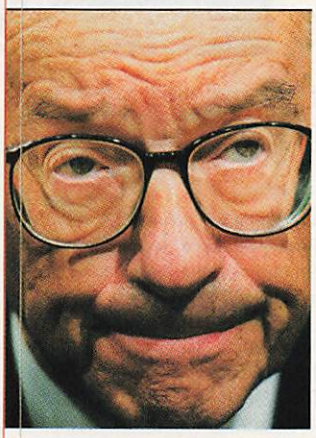
—Andrea Thompson (left), new CNN anchor and former *NYPD Blue* star

—Young women at Mardi Gras who apparently didn't understand that the cry "Show us your [breasts]" was optional

—A cheating British boyfriend who made the mistake of posing in panties, a bra, cowboy boots, and makeup during happier days

Which one of the following was not offered via online auction this year?





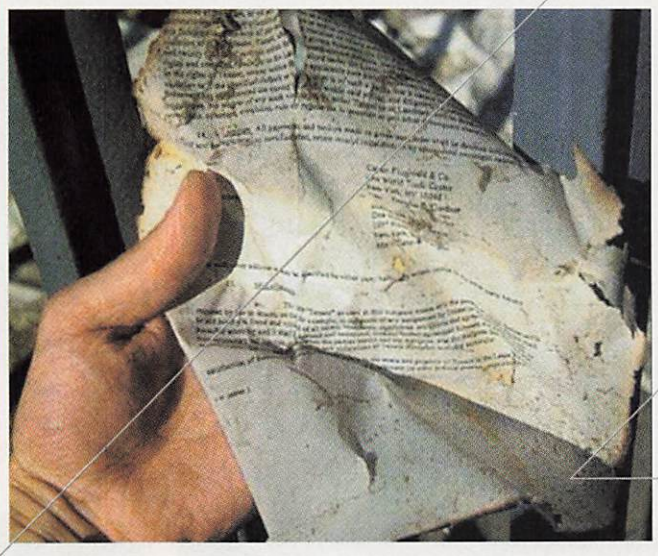
1 Serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer's prison hygiene kit.
2 Dinner with rocker Ted Nugent.
3 Michael Jordan's 1991 championship sweat socks.
4 A seat on ABC's *Politically Incorrect With Bill Maher.*
5 Rubble from the Seattle earthquake.
6 Rubble from the Russian space station *Mir*'s plunge into the Pacific Ocean.
7 A piece from the bullet-riddled door of Amadou Diallo, the African immigrant shot to death by New York City police.
8 A pair of 1880s Levi's jeans found in a Nevada mining town.
9 An invitation for somebody to "kick your ass."
10 Madonna's bustier—autographed!
11 A record-company rejection letter declaring Madonna "not ready yet."
12 Actual hairs from Alan Greenspan's eyebrows.
13 All of recent University of Iowa graduate student John Freyer's stuff, including his two false front teeth.

[Answer: 3]

PRINCE: STEVE PARKE; THOMPSON: MARC ROYCE/CORBIS OUTLINE; NUGENT: DALE MAY/COREIS OUTLINE; GREENSPAN: REUTERS NEWMEDIA INC./CORBIS; MADONNA'S BUSTIER: REUTERS NEWMEDIA INC./CORBIS

'01 TALK OF THE NET P.S.

Post-September 11 A tragedy's aftershocks reverberated with poignancy, spirit, and quirkiness throughout the Net



Powerful PowerPoint Disparaged for aiding and abetting millions of boring corporate presentations, Microsoft PowerPoint became a vehicle for profound expression after September 11. This photo, from "Ground Zero: Five Days After the Attack," a PowerPoint show created by rescue worker Bob Kaufman and mass-forwarded via e-mail, is just one of the raw, arresting visuals captured for posterity.

Call Mulder and Scully In the wake of September 11, loopy numerologists had a field day. Thanks to their e-mails and postings, just about anybody with Net access now knows that 9+1+1=11, and that there were 111 days left until the end of the year after 9/11, that Flight 11 was the first plane to hit the towers, and that *New York City, Afghanistan,* and *the Pentagon* have 11 letters each. Wise surfers noted that there are also 11 letters in *gullibility.*

Did the right thing Filmmaker and Knicks fanatic Spike Lee auctioned off one of his prime seats for the New York Knicks–Washington Wizards season opener on **NBA.com** and **Yahoo! Auctions** for $101,300, with proceeds going to the Widow's and Children's Fund of the Uniformed Firefighters Association. The unidentified winning bidder beat out, among others, AudioNet gazillionaire **Mark Cuban**.

Fearsome fashion Infectious Awareables **[iawareables.com]** set up shop long before the attacks, but its necktie design based on an enlargement of the anthrax bacillus has never been more au courant.

Is it unreal or is it Osama? "Frag his sorry ass....Nuthin' like a close-up head shot to make ya feel better!" reads the teaser for this Unreal Tournament skin created by the avatar specialists at CyberExtruder. If only all violence could be this virtual.

TIMELINE

the highest-grossing pre-opening-day sale of online tickets thus far, but at press time *The Lord of the Rings* was expected to challenge the new record.

DECEMBER ONLINE HOLIDAY shopping receipts are expected to reach $11 billion (up 10 percent from 2000) as consumers stick closer to home in the wake of terrorist attacks.

AFTER TWO YEARS OF baiting fans with a massive online marketing campaign, New Line Cinema releases ***The Fellowship of the Ring,*** the first in the movie trilogy ***The Lord of the Rings.***

PAPER WITH BURNED EDGES: COPYRIGHT 2001, ROBERT KAUFMAN; *HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE*: PETER MOUNTAIN; *LORD OF THE RINGS*: PIERRE VINET/NEW LINE

THIN

Cathode-ray tubes are *so* 20th century. Flat-panel displays and TVs make everything, including your office and living room, look a whole lot better

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVIES + STARR

IS IN

Go ahead. Measure your monitor. How deep is it? Twelve inches? Eighteen inches? Take a ruler to your TV. Even worse, right? When it comes to displays, flat is where it's at.

Measuring as little as an inch thick, a desktop LCD display can help you recover acres of desk space, and its no-flicker picture is easier on the eyes than that of any traditional monitor. Of course, that means you'll get more work done, netting you more money, which in turn will allow you to afford your pricey new monitor—how's

BY ASA SOMERS

that for circular logic? If the prices quoted here are too steep for you, look for smaller models from the same manufacturers.

When it's time to channel-surf, feast your eyes on a wide-screen, flat-panel TV based on either LCD or plasma technology. Featuring HDTV-ready electronics and a 16:9 aspect ratio, these TVs are ideally suited for watching movies in their original wide-screen format instead of in the annoying cropped style you see on a standard 4:3 model. As Charlton Heston races his chariot in *Ben-Hur*, you'll be able to see all around the track.

Flat panels are even appearing in handheld tablet-style computers with touch-sensitive screens. The only problem with such cool-looking displays, TVs, and tablets: You may not feel like looking at anything else.

1

1 TV Star

SHARP AQUOS

How thin? 2.4 inches

Put it on a table, hang it on a wall, or suspend it from the ceiling. Sharp has come up with a TV that looks great and fits just about anywhere. Models range from 10 inches ($1,000) up to 20 inches (shown here). $3,300

sharp-usa.com

2 Up and Down

NEC MULTISYNC LCD 1850X

How thin? 3 inches

The large, 18.1-inch display swivels to support either the traditional landscape mode or the vertically oriented portrait mode. That makes it ideal for displaying long Web pages all at once. $1,799

necmitsubishi.com

3 Movie Screen

PANASONIC TC-11LV1

How thin? 6.9 inches

It's *Casablanca* on the countertop. The newest in Panasonic's line of combination TV/DVD players, this cute 11-inch model brings a film-friendly wide-screen aspect ratio to small kitchens and bedrooms. $1,600

panasonic.com

2

3

4

5

4 Superslim

SONY MULTISCAN SDM-N80

How thin? About 1 inch

Sony's design engineers strike again. This 18.1-inch display cuts a very stylish profile and has just one cable, not the two or three that are sometimes needed on other displays. $1,700 sony.com/displays

5 Home Theater

PHILIPS FLATTV

How thin? 3.5 inches

Rated best plasma TVs by the European Imaging and Sound Association, this line's offerings now include a 32-inch model that's more affordable than its bigger cousins. An optional $1,000 receiver unit delivers such features as a picture-in-picture capability. $5,999 usa.philips.com

6 Sketch Pad

WACOM CINTIQ 15X

How thin? 2 inches

Two for the price of one: The Cintiq is both a 15-inch desktop display and a pressure-sensitive tablet that you can use for graphical applications such as freehand drawing. $1,899 wacom.com

7 Jumbo Vision

FUJITSU PLASMAVISION PDS-5002

How thin? 3.8 inches

The Super Bowl party will be at your house this year. With 50 diagonal inches of superbright picture, this is one very big TV. It comes with its own stand; use a stud finder if you decide to mount this 99-pounder on the wall. $14,999 plasmavision.com

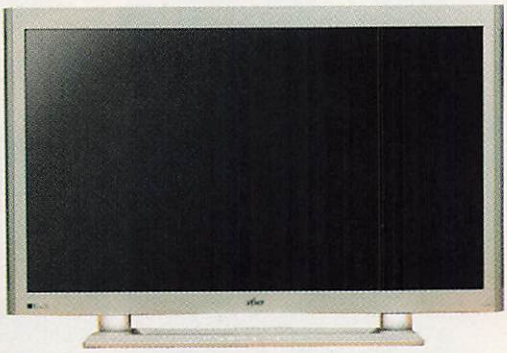
8 Workhorse

VIEWSONIC VP230MB

How thin? 2 inches

This is it—the mother of all desktop displays, with a mind-boggling 23.1 diagonal inches of screen space and a price tag to match. It's the high-end choice for rocket scientists, architects, and artists. $5,379 viewsonic.com

6



7

8

ON THE INTERNET, NOBODY KNOWS IF YOU'RE BOBBY FISCHER

IS THE LEGENDARY CHESS RECLUSE ALIVE AND WELL AND PLAYING ANONYMOUSLY? WE PICK UP THE ONLINE TRAIL OF A FAMOUS PHANTOM

BY BRAD WIENERS

Illustration by Scott Lauman

The rumors started more than a year and a half ago but weren't taken seriously. Then, this past September, a British grandmaster named Nigel Short stepped forward and claimed it was true: Bobby Fischer, the reclusive American chess legend who at age 14 became the youngest U.S. chess champion ever—and who exiled himself from the game after winning the world championship from Russian Boris Spassky in 1972—was logging on to play three-minute games of blitz chess at the **Internet Chess Club [chessclub.com]**. Not only that, Short asserted, Fischer—who came out of retirement only once, in 1992, to defeat Spassky in a controversial rematch—is at the top of his game. The former child prodigy won most of their 50 matchups, dazzling Short with brazen tactics and blinding speed that left the Englishman "99 percent" certain he'd faced the best chess player of the last, and quite possibly any, generation.

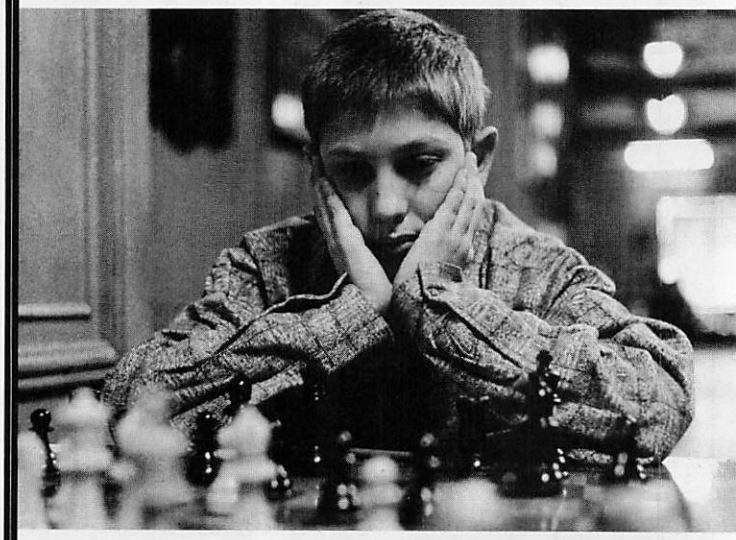
In these matches, which had begun with a dubious encounter back in October 2000 and concluded sometime in May 2001, Short said his "unseen opponent" often began games with "totally absurd," self-destructive opening moves, and then came back from severe deficits to annihilate him. Despite his poor showing, Short said, he treasured their games, calling them "what an undiscovered Mozart symphony would be to a music lover." Regrettably, these symphonies can't be heard by the rest of us. Short's Fischer insisted that both he and Short play as unapproved guests of the ICC, ensuring that few would be tempted to witness the contests and that none of the games would be recorded. Short knew it all sounded sketchy, but after seven months he'd become convinced that his opponent was *the* Bobby Fischer.

"He was polite, funny, and clearly an American," Short wrote in London's *Sunday Telegraph* on September 9. "He was also obviously very familiar in a gossipy way with the major figures in the chess world of the 1960s—Fischer's period of greatest activity." Though Short never asked his rival directly if he was Bobby Fischer, he did ask him biographically leading questions, which were answered coyly but correctly.

Naturally, Short's revelation set the online chess world abuzz, and a few weeks after Short's assertion, I tried to pick up the trail of this famous phantom. Fischer, or the possibility of him, struck me as a thrilling reminder of one of the Net's early and essential appeals: the chance it offered to hide in plain sight. Even if you never took advantage of it—never posted under an alias, lurked undetected in a chatroom, or passed yourself off as a member of the opposite sex—knowing you *could* made going online more like moving to a new city than taking a trip to the local mall; the browser itself became a sort of rear window. If it was inevitable that online anonymity would be weakened in the name of consumer confidence and homeland defense, it's still sad to see it go. Or so I thought when my own search for Bobby Fischer began. Turns out things were a bit more complicated than I anticipated.

From the get-go, many were doubtful that Short's Fischer was Bobby Fischer: *Yeah, sure, and Elvis is releasing new MP3s.* Like a volunteer mob of chess vigilantes, a number of naysayers set out to test Short's claims and, with luck, expose the prankster who'd duped him. We'll come to that in a moment.

First, I reached the president of the Internet Chess Club, Danny Sleator, at his Carnegie Mellon University office in Pittsburgh. "I *do* think



Bobby Fischer is playing on ICC," said Sleator, a computer science professor. "Where else would he play?" Founded in 1995, the ICC is not the most popular Web chess site, but it is the premier Web chess destination—the chess player's chess site. Among its 24,000 members are two-thirds of the world's 600 or so grandmasters. The grandmaster title is awarded, on the basis of player performances, by **FIDE [www.fide.org]**, the Switzerland-based Fédération Internationale des Échecs, or International Chess Federation. Like FIDE, the ICC boasts an international membership, drawing from 50-plus countries. Only half of the ICC's members are from the U.S., and its ranks include a few celebs, among them Sting—who, incidentally, plays under an alias.

Though not as profitable as porn or market data, chess has proven to be one of the more durable Web businesses. There's an avid base of players who are willing to pay for good chess programming (among them are many who played correspondence, or postal, chess prior to playing online) and who like to talk shop. Discussions of the 1997 rematch between IBM's Deep Blue and then world champion Garry Kasparov—which went to Deep Blue in six—not only lit up IBM's sites, but also almost single-handedly kept the lights on at virtual communities such as **Electric Minds [www.electricminds.org]**. October 2001 saw an impressive turnout for the first-ever Internet world chess championship. Even so, the Fischer rumors created a welcome surge in traffic and games at ICC. Sleator went so far as to splash "I played Bobby Fischer on ICC!" on the site's home page.

Was there any chance that had been the plan? That spreading this information was a clever publicity scheme? No, Sleator insisted—Short and the others claiming to have "met" Fischer on ICC had all acted on their own. But he sure wished he'd thought of it sooner.

"On the other hand," he continued, "I *am* skeptical of Short's

ABOVE: 1956, PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN; BOBBY FISCHER AT 13. OPPOSITE: COVERS OF *LIFE* (1971) AND *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* (1972).

CORBIS/BETTMANN

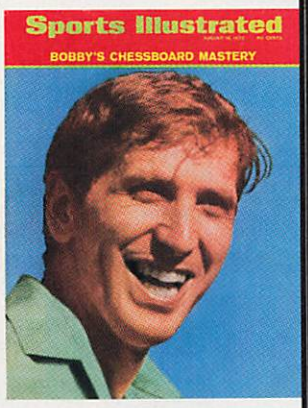
claims. I'm surprised he didn't keep more of a record to analyze." Most GMs, Sleator pointed out, have the ability to recall entire games from memory, so it's odd that Short, who was runner-up to the world championship in 1993, failed to reconstruct more than the unconventional openers.

Surely Sleator or his administrators had logs that would reveal if "Fischer" was Fischer—something a user couldn't see but a system operator could? No, Sleator explained. It seems that "Fischer" went to a lot of trouble to cover his tracks. Not only did he insist that he and his opponent log back in as guests to play, he used interfaces that made it next to impossible to trace him to his ISP.

FISCHER, OR THE POSSIBILITY OF HIM, STRUCK ME AS A THRILLING REMINDER OF ONE OF THE NET'S EARLY AND ESSENTIAL APPEALS: THE CHANCE IT OFFERED TO HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT

"We really tried to reconstruct some of the [user] logs," said Sleator. "Once we did track someone who might be the Fischer character to an ISP in the U.K., but it was inconclusive." Sleator volunteered that he'd gotten complaints about anonymity in the past, but several ICC members like the system because they can try out new, potentially embarrassing strategies with impunity and avoid having opponents download and study their games right before tournament play. As for any new evidence emerging later, Sleator doubted it. "The trail," he explained, "is cold."

Not so, however, for Frederic Friedel, cocreator of Fritz (a leading PC-based chess program) and cofounder of **ChessBase [chessbase.com]** (Hamburg, Germany's, answer to the ICC). No sooner had Short's revelation been typeset than Friedel collected any and all clues about "Fischer"—his chatter and games that had been saved by other grandmasters—and set about determining if, as he suspected, "Fischer" was a prankster who used computers to show up the game's elite players.



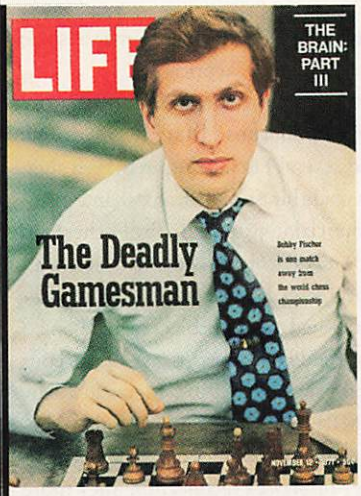
Friedel first challenged the gossip Short reported, pointing out that computer chess games can spit out chess trivia in a few keystrokes. This didn't prove that Short's Fischer wasn't Fischer, but it did indicate that someone wishing to pass himself off as Fischer could do so without breaking a sweat.

Next, Friedel dissected "Fischer's" approach to the game. The Bobby Fischer of lore, Friedel suggested, would never use the ridiculous openings Short had described—they were sick, rude, uncouth maneuvers that any top-level player would find odious; Fischer, by contrast, had always been a courtly player. On this point, many disagree. When I spoke to Tom Brownscombe at the U.S. Chess Federation, he emphasized that grandmaster Fischer always did what he had to to win. He didn't have a signature style so much as a will, a ferocity, and fresh ideas that could seem like mistakes until he proved them otherwise.

Fine, but what Friedel couldn't abide was the coupling of the unconventional opening moves with the incredibly rapid recoveries and endgames that followed, and, sure enough, he found that many of these subsequent moves could have been suggested by the most powerful computer chess programs. All "Fischer" had to do was play with two hands: one on the controls of the computer chess game, the other on the game in progress with Short or whomever.

"Only a computer would be able to do what the mysterious ICC Fischer has done," Friedel posted on the site. "It is exactly what you would expect from a fast, tactical program. Load Fritz, Junior, Shredder, or Tiger, preferably on a 1.4GHz or faster machine, force the first moves of the ICC Fischer player, and then play on against the program. At three-minute time controls."

Most posts to the discussion on Friedel's page agree that the anonymous circumstances of "Fischer's" play suggest a hoax, while the style of play, in particular, points to a new breed of cyborg grandmaster. One post, from "Jason L." in the U.S., claims to be from just such a con artist.



HI I'D JUST LIKE TO SAY that I guarantee Bobby is *not* on the internet playing chess. Why? Cuz I am *the* best chess cheat on the internet and the situation is very familiar to me. In the last year, I have played thousands of games cheating and have yet to ever come close to losing even one game....The chess program I use is immaterial....it is the system that I use. I have written an autoplayer program...I just start up a one min game and sit back and watch my program play by itself....Also, it is very easy to create a user opening book with moves so outrageous that people think there is no way it's a computer. No, I am not the Fischer character in the web. Yes, cheating is fun. I get so much satisfaction laying a GM in a 2 min game and watching him resign after 25 moves, and then urging him to take up checkers.

As startling as that might be for Short or other grandmasters to read, a few weeks after that post an even more startling thing happened. On the evening of September 30, a player with a GM title calling himself—what else?—BobbyFischer appeared on a ChessBase beta site for the company's latest release of Fritz, Fritz7. Was this Short's Fischer, a copycat Bobby Fischer, Fischer himself, or even Jason L.? According to Friedel, it sure seemed like Short's Fischer—he got off to a sloppy start, then proceeded to slaughter his competition. The difference, of course, was that he was now doing it in full view.

"The games were quite mind-boggling, the moves and ideas truly spectacular," Friedel said. "Most important, many of the moves came with lightning speed, much faster than any human slaving a computer's moves could possibly execute on the server." Several onlookers were becoming convinced it must be Fischer after all. But a ChessBase player named Erdogan Günes decided to test Friedel's cyborg theory in real time.

Günes "fired up his dual-processor machine, started a strong tactical engine on half of his big computer monitor, and logged on to the Fritz server," Friedel reported later. "He challenged BobbyFischer and immediately won two games in a row. After that the two played furiously, game after game after game. Erdogan, who is one of the most experienced computer operators around, used both hands, one to enter the moves in Fritz7 with the mouse, the other to type in the moves on Fritz6 for the engine. Although BobbyFischer was even faster, Erdogan was able to keep up. In the end, after 13 games, the score was 6.5–6.5. Suddenly BobbyFischer left. So was it the real thing, Robert James Fischer, as some of the spectators insisted? We are still deeply skeptical."

THE MOVES AND IDEAS WERE TRULY SPECTACULAR. MANY OF THE MOVES CAME WITH LIGHTNING SPEED, MUCH FASTER THAN ANY HUMAN SLAVING A COMPUTER'S MOVES COULD POSSIBLY EXECUTE ON THE SERVER

Fischer himself could put all these rumors to rest, and, as I discovered while reading Tim Krabbé's **Open Chess Diary [www.xs4all.nl/~timkr/chess2/diary.htm]** and several Fischer-inspired Web sites, the middle-aged grandmaster has made himself less scarce than I imagined. Or, at least, there was someone claiming to be Bobby Fischer who posted an author's endorsement on Amazon, provided fan sites with documents from what would appear to be his own scrapbook, and frequently visited the Philippines. There, he'd made a habit of calling Bombo Radyo, the freewheeling NPR of the Philippines, to give outrageous commentaries to his friend and talk-show host, Pablo Mercado. Many of them have been converted to MP3 format and posted on the Web.

Putting it mildly, the MP3s of the Bombo Radyo broadcasts don't sound a bit like the polite Fischer of Short's recollection; they more resemble Marlon Brando's Colonel Kurtz babbling in the jungle of *Apocalypse Now*. During a September 2001 call-in, mere hours after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Fischer applauds the devastation and loss of life in America as "wonderful news."

"The U.S. and Israel have been slaughtering the Palestinians for years," Fischer tells Bombo Radyo listeners. "Nobody gave a shit. Now it is coming back to the U.S. Fuck the U.S. I want to see the U.S. wiped out."

Fischer's contempt is, apparently, at least partly personal: "Nobody has single-handedly done more for the U.S. image than me, I really believe in this. When I won the World Championship in '72, the United States had an image of, you know, it was a football country, a baseball country, but nobody thought of it as an intellectual country. I turned all that around single-handedly, right? But I was useful then because it was the Cold War, right? But now I'm not useful anymore, you see, the Cold War is over, and now they want to wipe me out, steal everything I have, put me in prison."

Along with the trove of MP3s, one site had a form for e-mailing Bobby Fischer. While I awaited a reply to numerous e-mails I sent, I tried to reconcile the disembodied voice of Fischer the shock jock of Manila with the ICC phantom and what I knew about the Fischer of 30 years ago.

Robert James Fischer came into the world on March 9, 1943, in Chicago, son to Hans-Gerhardt Fischer and Dr. Regina Wender Fischer and younger brother to Joan, six years his senior. Bobby and Joan's parents split when he was two, and Bobby's father went missing from their lives. As journalist Brad Darrach noted, "Bobby likes to say that he didn't need a father."

Bobby learned to play chess at six, with a set bought for one dollar, and in 1958, at age 14, he became the youngest U.S. chess champion ever. Especially because of his success at an early age, young players such as Josh Waitzkin (featured in the fine 1993 film *Searching for Bobby Fischer*) still revere him. A year later, when Bobby was 15, his mother left for Russia and he began living on his own, a teenage hermit in a Brooklyn apartment. He never finished high school. This time, he boasted of having gotten "rid of" his mother.

"Bobby covered his fear and loneliness with arrogance," Darrach wrote in his 1974 book, *Bobby Fischer Vs. the Rest of the World*. "He sneered at players four times his age. Half Jewish himself, he assumed a pose of anti-Semitism in a New York chess community that was better than four-fifths Jewish." In fact, years earlier, in 1962, Fischer had given an interview to *Harper's* magazine in which he'd clearly wanted to taunt, perhaps playfully, his Jewish opponents: "There are too many Jews in chess," he told Ralph Ginzburg. "They seem to have taken away the class of the game. They don't seem to dress so nicely. That's what I don't like."

For the most part, Fischer's offensive remarks were chalked up to youth and overlooked because of his genius, especially as he mounted a successful challenge—at the height of the Cold War—to the Russian stranglehold on chess championships. But Fischer struggled immensely after winning the world title in 1972, and his tendency to reject friends and confidants left him without anyone who could help him recover after big matches, deal with fame, and simply grow up. He also contended with some real betrayal, notably in his relationship with Brad Darrach. To gain access to Fischer for a *Life* magazine article, Darrach had signed an agreement that he wouldn't pursue a book deal. After he wrote *Bobby Fischer Vs. the Rest of the World*, Fischer sued. The lawsuit was ultimately dismissed on a technicality, probably owing to the fact that Fischer represented himself.

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

"I do not know which is more bad, the match or after the match," Boris Spassky told Darrach after relinquishing the world championship to Fischer—and nearly losing his sanity in the process. "In a long match

a player shall go very deep into himself, like a diver. Then very fast he comes up. Every time, win or lose, I am so depressed I want to die...I have played many long match. But this is first for Bobby. It will be for him a hard time. Now he feels like a god. He thinks all problems are over—he will have many friends, people will love him, history will obey him. But is not so. In these high places is very cold, very lonely. Soon will come depression. I like him, and I am afraid what will happen to him now."

Fischer, who liked to say that "all I want to do, ever, is play chess," surrendered his title to Anatoly Karpov in 1975 when he failed to participate in the championship tournament. From a distance, it appeared he'd developed a persecution complex—evident later in a self-published 1982 rant, *I Was Tortured in the Pasadena Jailhouse!*

Ten years later, in September 1992, Fischer came out of retirement to play Spassky again, this time in Sveti Stefan, Yugoslavia. Fischer won, but Spassky was then ranked only 101st in the world, making it difficult to know how capable Fischer was or to infer if he's likely to be sharp now. He also earned himself a federal indictment when he literally spat on an order from the U.S. Treasury warning him not to play. (Both the U.S. and U.N. had sanctions against Yugoslavia at the time, and Fischer still faces up to 10 years in prison, $250,000 in fines, and the return of the roughly $3.5 million kitty he won if he's arrested in the U.S.) Rather than face any charges or settle the matter, Fischer traveled to Argentina, and from there to Hungary and Japan.

"What I'm really hoping for, Pablo," says Fischer in one of his Bombo Radyo diatribes, "did you ever see that movie *Seven Days in May*? That's a movie about a general who tries to take over the U.S.A....I'm hoping for some kind of a *Seven Days in May* scenario, where the country will be taken over by the military and they'll close down all the synagogues, arrest all the Jews, execute hundreds of thousands of Jewish ringleaders, and, you know, apologize to the Arabs."

ZORAIDA DIAZ/NEWSCOM

In previous interviews, Fischer decried errors introduced by editors and publishers in chess books he's written and railed against an international Jewish conspiracy to corrupt and steal his ideas. Though the Bombo Radyo particulars are contemporary, they're consistent with the kind of remarks Fischer made in his prime—only now he lacks the youth and displays of talent to temper them. They also seem to have hardened into a worldview that divides Fischer's enduring fans into at least three camps: those who see him foremost as a geopolitical and pop-culture martyr; those who view him as a victim of his own arrested development and monomania; and finally, those who think that while he may have once had legitimate cause to feel hounded, none of this excuses his evident bigotry today.

And yet, optimistically, I thought, could it be that Bombo Radyo was also being hoaxed? Perhaps the shock jock Fischer was no more real than the terror of the Internet Chess Club? Pablo Mercado doesn't think so. Reached in Manila, the radio host said he knew Fischer personally, that Fischer was living in Japan, and that he had met with him during his visits to the Philippines. The man railing on his show was, he reassured me, *the* Bobby Fischer.

Did Mercado know if Fischer was playing chess online? "I can't confirm this," he said. "But it is a possibility." As I set down the phone, Mercado's unconfirmed possibility made it seem for a moment that I was right back where I had started—stymied by the very qualities of anonymity and evasiveness I thought I missed about the Net. And yet, I wasn't either.

Sure, the Net puts everything up for grabs—even your very existence. The author Robert Anton Wilson, for one, labored for years to dispel rumors of his own demise, which had started in a Usenet group. At the same time, my search for Bobby Fischer revealed that as much as the Web browser is a rear window, it's also a dragnet: It serves up an open case file on notorious lives, a case file crammed with eyewitness accounts, PDFs and GIFs of documents and photos, databases of interviews, press clips, you name it. Even if much of the content of this case file is suspect, patterns emerge. And in this instance, the patterns suggested a man I wasn't sure I really wanted to find.

As this article went to press, Fischer himself had not replied to numerous e-mails (most bounced) and faxes, including one sent to a friend of Fischer who'd been identified as a go-between in a Bombo Radyo broadcast. During several of these broadcasts, Fischer "challenges" any radio station or online venue, even in the "filthy, dirty U.S.A.," to invite him on, but only "live" so his words can't be manipulated. Maybe, given his vitriol, it's just as well that he didn't respond to me. As I listened to his hateful MP3 rants, I found myself drawn back to Nigel Short's Fischer—the unseen player who restores rather than diminishes the legend; a ghost who tricks grandmasters and fans alike into feeling as though they've been part of a lost, beautiful, and unrecoverable symphony. ■

OPPOSITE: 1972, FISCHER VS. SPASSKY IN ICELAND.
ABOVE: 1996, FISCHER INTRODUCES A NEW WAY TO PLAY CHESS IN BUENOS AIRES.

Brad Wieners writes for *Wired, Business 2.0,* and *Outside.*

the future.

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OUR ANNUAL AWARDS FOR NET EXCELLENCE

100 best sites '02

Sites of the Times

BY ALAN COHEN

More Americans than ever before are turning to the Web for vital information. We're also doing more business as usual online, from shopping to banking to research, and then decompressing with fantasy sports or trivia games. And as the stakes get higher, so do *Y-Life*'s standards. This year's guide—our fourth annual—to the cream of the Internet crop has been assembled with extra care. Whatever uncertainty awaits the country in the months ahead, the 100 Best Sites will serve you well.

ENTERTAINMENT & SPORTS ▶80
Movies, music, games, gossip

COMPUTING & THE NET ▶83
Product reviews, computer news, chat

LIFESTYLE & COMMUNITY ▶85
Fashion, food, home, relationships

HEALTH & FITNESS ▶88
Heart disease, mental health, nutrition

LEARNING & CREATIVITY ▶89
Reference, language translation, art

TRAVEL & RECREATION ▶93
Great deals, adventure vacations

MONEY & SHOPPING ▶94
Taxes, loans, job-hunting

NEWS & MEDIA ▶97
Humor, graphics, business news

entertainment&sports

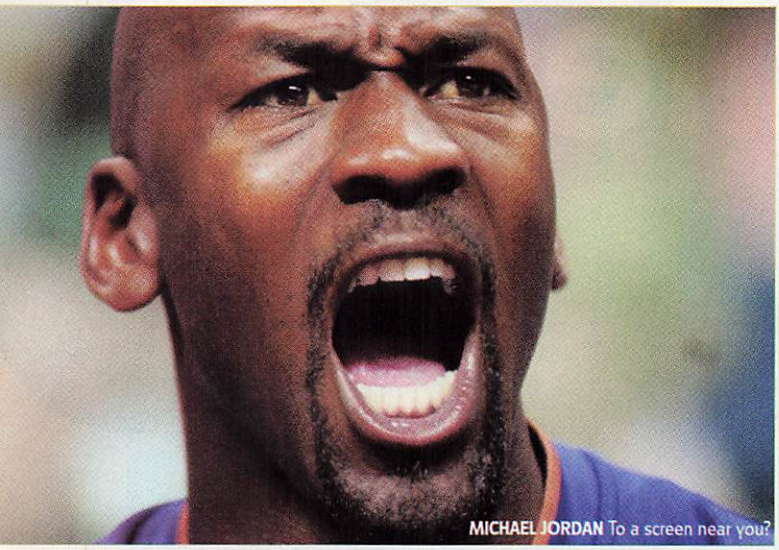
By Bilge Ebiri

Entertainment on the Net was poised to come of age this year, but music and film stalled out. Meanwhile, sports took the lead in key arenas

A lot of people were hoping that 2001 would be the year when the bigwigs in entertainment—the major movie studios, record companies, and sports leagues—would finally get wise to the real potential of the Internet. It looks as if that may have to wait. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the entertainment world's concerns became more immediate: how to raise money—both online and off—for important causes while reconfiguring content in an appropriate manner, and how to survive in an economy that was already on shaky ground.

Before September, the big news was still the Napster controversy and its aftermath. While RIAA lawsuits and self-imposed filters eventually succeeded in rendering the file-trading site virtually useless, a multitude of similar services emerged, muddying the waters. Meanwhile, the record labels announced that they would cooperate in creating two Napster-style subscription services: **MusicNet [musicnet.com]** and **Pressplay [pressplay.com]**. Originally they were due to launch during the summer; at press time, they still hadn't premiered. Observers continue to hope that the services will help resolve the controversies still dogging online music.

Net-based film didn't fare much better. For much of the year, prospects looked bleak for downloadable or streamed movies on the Web. Then, in August, a number of Hollywood studios announced a major initiative to make their catalogs jointly available for rental online. True, that much-hyped service, which is to be made available through Sony's **Moviefly [moviefly.com]**, has been slow to appear. But if it succeeds, it may well change the face of online entertainment for good—and we mean it this time.



MICHAEL JORDAN To a screen near you?

In the sports arena, the National Basketball Association made significant steps toward Webcasting its related properties, even planning to cybercast select WNBA games. But regular video cybercasting of NBA games remains a dream.

That does not mean, however, that the sports world is oblivious to the Net. Thanks to such Web-savvy owners as Ted Leonsis, of the Washington Capitals and Wizards, some teams have used their official sites to allow a whole new demographic of fans to purchase season tickets by paying in installments, on credit without interest. Since Net-based ticket sales such as these have proven to be cost-effective, perhaps other teams might try a similar approach.

Who knows? The year 2002 may prove to be the one when the honchos in the entertainment and sports worlds finally get wise to the real potential of the Internet. Wait, is there an echo in here?

1 BEST ORIGINAL WEB PROGRAMMING

Shockwave.com

This site has long been home to some of the Web's most imaginative animation, including Tim Burton's *Stainboy*. Now add to the mix the creative output of **AtomFilms**, which Shockwave has acquired and is hosting on its site. New and noteworthy are *Angry Kid: Captain Thunderpants*, from the creators of *Wallace & Gromit*, and—if the thought of Jim Belushi doesn't faze you—*The Greedy Show*. ALSO: Broadband-enabled surfers should test-drive Sony's **Screenblast**, where the cinematically inclined can create and showcase their own brilliant Web works. **[shockwave.com]; [www.atomfilms.com]; [screenblast.com]**

2 BEST MOVIE RESEARCH SITE

The Internet Movie Database

For years, we've been turning to the IMDb to settle bar bets about our favorite flicks and stars—and judging from the site's popularity, so have you. Pick up all manner of movie-biz factoids, including the name of Russell Crowe's band (30-Odd Foot of Grunts) and Nicole Kidman's birthplace (Honolulu), and get more proof that Tom Hanks has it better than you do (total earnings from *Forrest Gump*: $70 million and counting). **[imdb.com]**

3 BEST MOVIE QUIZZES

FilmWise

Thanks to FilmWise, you can stun your friends with your vast recall of *Dumb & Dumber*. The visual quizzes are fun even when you have no idea which dog is from *Turner and Hootch* and which is from *K-9*, or can't tell Donald Sutherland's naked rear end

JORDAN: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; CAPTAIN THUNDERPANTS: COURTESY OF SHOCKWAVE.COM; INVISIBLES: COURTESY OF FILMWISE.COM

ANGRY KID Captain Thunderpants.

from Holly Hunter's. But our favorite challenge is the Invisibles quiz: Faces and limbs are erased from movie screenshots, and you get to guess the flick. It's addictive fun. We just wish they had done some erasing on that backside quiz. **[filmwise.com]**

4 BEST MOVIE REVIEWS

MRQE: Movie Review Query Engine

We feel sort of funny rewarding a site that boasts nearly 170 reviews of *Space Cowboys*, but the MRQE is nothing if not complete. If you have time for only one *Airport* flick, what's it going to be: *'75* or *'77*? Get critiques for movies old and new from big-time critics (*Entertainment Weekly, The New York Times*), as well as more obscure folks (Planet Sick-Boy). ALSO: Heck, why even bother to read the review when you can just scan a scorecard of major critics at CheckTheGrid? **[www.mrqe.com]; [checkthegrid.com]**

5 BEST DVD RENTALS

Netflix

There's a reason Netflix has attracted a cultlike band of DVD-equipped movie buffs (more than 300,000 strong and growing). For $20 per month, you can rent any three DVDs at one time. Keep them out as long as you want, too. When you're done with a movie, stick it in its prepaid mailer and drop it in a mailbox. Netflix then mails you the next movie on your list. There are no late fees—and no smug looks from the Blockbuster clerk when you're renting *America's Sweethearts* for the third time in a month. **[netflix.com]**

6 BEST OVERALL MUSIC SITE

Sonicnet.com

Our perennial favorite, Sonicnet gives you not only the tunes but also the tales behind them. The top-notch news section serves up the details—and the dish—on releases, tours, delays, and lawsuits. The coverage of digital music is excellent. To all that, add streaming radio shows and music videos, plus exhaustive artist profiles that steer you to reviews, biographies, and fan sites. **[sonicnet.com]**

7 BEST MUSIC REFERENCE SITE

All Music Guide

If you've been losing sleep trying to remember the name of the Bee Gees' third album, well, you may need more help than any Web site can provide. But to answer your question, AMG is the reference of record. It not only tells you how the band came to be and which songs are on what albums, but also what other artists were influenced by its music. Be warned, however: There's stuff here you may not really need to know, such as the former band name of the Bangles (Supersonic Bangs). **[allmusicguide.com]**

8 BEST MUSIC DOWNLOADS

Audiogalaxy

Sure, Napster may be down for the count—at least, the free Napster we all loved (perhaps a bit too much). But that doesn't mean the plug has been pulled on all music downloads. At Audiogalaxy, up-and-coming bands post their own MP3s for your listening pleasure. But the real gem here is the Audiogalaxy Satellite software, which lets you share tunes with other music lovers. (Hmm, where have we seen that concept before?) There are lots of songs here—and so far, no lawyers. **[audiogalaxy.com]**

9 BEST MUSIC EVENTS GUIDE

FestivalFinder

How could you possibly go through life never knowing about Kanawha-Palooza (Charleston, West Virginia, February 1-3)? Well, fear not. FestivalFinder isn't slick, but it is the Web's best resource for locating musical gatherings across the country. More than 2,500 events are listed, in a wide variety of categories, including jazz, classical, reggae, rock, and even Cajun and zydeco. So, hop in the car and get moving—once you stop here and decide where you want to go. **[festivalfinder.com]**

10 BEST NET RADIO HUB

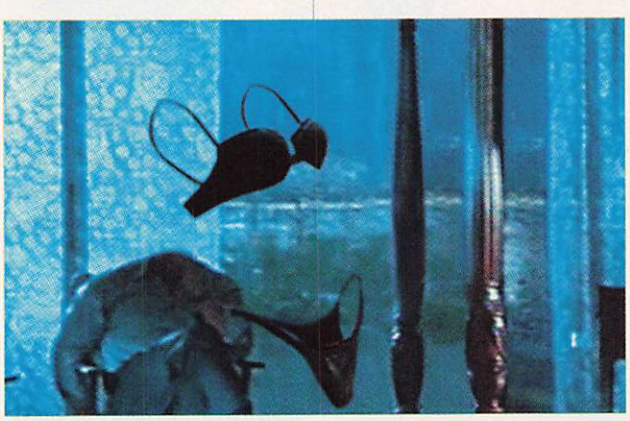
Real

Come here to get the excellent RealPlayer, then stick around to find great stuff to stream through it. Real's radio guide is just a quick and simple search engine, but it connects you to more than 2,500 online stations. In less time than it takes to switch the dial on Britney Spears, you can be tuning in to classic rock, blues, comedy, rap, and college stations across the country—and as far off as Bulgaria. And if you cough up cash for Real's GoldPass, you can listen to any major league baseball game live. **[real.com]**

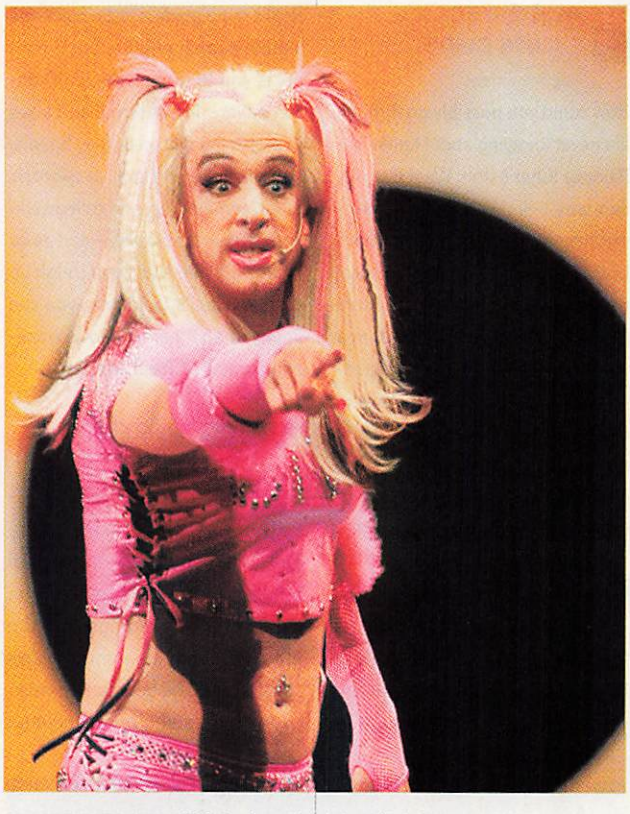
11 BEST SPORTS HUB

MSN: ESPN

Whether your tastes run to basketball, horse racing, or the rough-and-tumble world of professional bowling, ESPN can fill you in on the statistics, the standings, and the athletes. There are enough news stories, message boards, and video clips to keep you busy between



NAME THAT FLICK The Invisibles quiz at FilmWise asks you to fill in the blanks.



DRAGGIN' FOR DIRT E! Online's got the dish on Andy Dick and other celebs.

games—and to help you keep up your end of the conversation next time you run into Marv Albert. Bonus points for the fabulous Page 2, which features great columns by savvy sportswriters and is probably the only place online where you can read Hunter S. Thompson's musings on football. **[espn.com]**

12 BEST FANTASY SPORTS

CBS SportsLine.com

If you can't be an athlete, own an athlete—or at least pretend to. Fantasy sports let you draft and trade players, then get scored on how well your picks perform throughout a real season. SportsLine not only provides the games—baseball, football, golf, hockey, and even Indy and Nascar racing—but also the tools. It offers live and automated drafts, crunches all the numbers, and even provides wireless access to standings. ALSO: With its excellent tutorials, **Sandbox** turns fantasy-sports beginners into Rookie of the Year material. **[sportsline.com]; [sandbox.com]**

13 BEST FREE GAMES

Pogo.com

If your idea of a classic diversion goes a bit further back than Quake, Pogo should be your game parlor of choice. It's packed with traditional faves, including chess and bridge, as well as trivia and casino games. Thanks to Pogo's terrific multiplayer features, you can play the old standards in a whole new way. Pogo visitors typically find 100,000-plus other gamers ready to challenge them. Pick from beginner and expert rooms (and everything in between), and chat with your opponent as you trample him. ALSO: **Yahoo! Games** adds pool, pinochle, and mah-jongg to the golden oldies mix. **[pogo.com]; [games.yahoo.com]**

14 BEST GAME NEWS AND REVIEWS

GameSpot

The folks at GameSpot have a rough life: They play computer games all day and then write about them. At least the site's staff doesn't rub it in our face. Instead, they turn out reviews and game guides so thorough you start to wonder if there is any castle, civilization, planet, or dungeon they haven't spent an all-nighter tackling. They've even braved the minefields of The Sims: Hot Date (right). Video-game coverage is first rate, too, as is the news section. **[gamespot.com]**

15 BEST ENTERTAINMENT NEWS AND GOSSIP

E! Online

Let's face it: What's more entertaining than seeing the lives, loves, and legal woes of our favorite stars displayed on a high-profile Web site? The Celeb Courthouse at E! Online shows us that being a superstar isn't all about premieres and parties; if you're Arnold Schwarzenegger, sometimes it's about getting your face removed from slot machines, too. It's comforting to know that Andy Dick dresses worse than we do and that Cher has contractor problems. ALSO: If you can't wait for the next *Entertainment Weekly* magazine, **EW.com** dishes dirt daily. **[eonline.com]; [ew.com]**

16 BEST CULTURAL EVENTS GUIDE

CultureFinder.com

Whether you're in the middle of Times Square or Grand Rapids, CultureFinder can steer you straight to the artsy stuff, including plays, operas, dance companies, and museum exhibitions. Many listings have links to ticket sales online, as well as a seating chart, so you can decide whether to bring your binoculars. You can even have reminders e-mailed to you; that way, you won't forget about the upcoming production of Verdi's *Otello* in Baltimore. Do enough of these events and you won't feel so guilty about that next trip to Sea World. **[culturefinder.com]**

DICK: SCOTT GRIES/NEWSCOM; THE SIMS: COURTESY OF GAMESPOT.COM; MAN WITH LAPTOP: STEVE READ/GETTYONE

computing&the net

By Angela Gunn

File-sharing made waves, Microsoft had major ups and downs, and those Y2K contingency plans finally proved useful

Hamstrung early on by a skittish economy and overshadowed at year's end by hard questions about online surveillance and privacy, the Net's progress in 2001 centered on efforts to expand access for all. In the wake of Napster and similar music-sharing systems, the peer-to-peer movement continued to gain momentum with applications designed to share files of all kinds, despite harsh criticism from intellectual-property advocates.

Microsoft scored a big win in June when a federal appeals court vacated U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson's June 2000 ruling that called for the company to be split in two. At press time, negotiations continued but the government no longer sought to break up the software giant—a sea change that some analysts credit to Microsoft's growing importance to the entertainment business and other nontech industries.

However, the company still faced trouble on several fronts. After repeated virus and worm epidemics exposed continuing problems with Microsoft's Internet Information Server software, a leading advisory group recommended that companies avoid using the product, which shipped with every copy of Windows 2000. Microsoft's proposed Passport service, which promised to streamline online shopping sprees with a digital wallet, came under fire from privacy advocates, who claimed it offered scant protection for personal information. The company was embarrassed in January (by a hacker who managed to forge a VeriSign Trusted Site certificate) and in August (by letters of support for Microsoft sent to Utah's Attorney General from, as it turned out, several dead people). Meanwhile, the European Union was considering its own antitrust action against Microsoft.

In the hardware domain, the PC turned 20 in August. Another milestone occurred on September 8, when "Unix time"—the count kept by the operating system that underpins vast sections of the Internet—crossed the billion-second mark. Despite scattered concerns of Y2K-esque problems, the day was blessedly uneventful, owing in part to massive code cleanups undertaken several years ago in anticipation of potential millennial meltdown. Although no amount of preparation could soften the horror on the East Coast three days later, Y2K contingencies—along with disaster planning in the wake of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing—prevented even more cataclysmic financial losses there.

17 BEST WEB PORTAL
Yahoo!

Yahoo! Internet Life picking Yahoo! as best portal? Why, yes. In fact, we've crowned Yahoo! the winner in several categories this year—but only because it's the best. Our writers were asked to come up with top sites in each category, without fear or favor. And so they did. Yahoo! delivers on so many fronts—outstanding shopping, news, chat, and e-mail features; excellent wireless access—that it came up the winner. It's also an unequaled directory to practically every Web site you'd ever want to visit. **[yahoo.com]**

18 BEST SEARCH ENGINE
Google

This baby just keeps getting better—and bigger, with some 1.6 billion Web pages now indexed. On top of all the features we love—uncannily accurate results, cached pages of defunct sites—the wizards from Stanford University have added new search tools for PDF files, Usenet posts and, best yet, images. In just a nanosecond or two, we found hundreds of pictures of Jennifer Lopez. ALSO: **Vivisimo** does a bang-up job of organizing results from other search engines. **[google.com]; [vivisimo.com]**

19 BEST CONSUMER COMPUTER NEWS
CNET

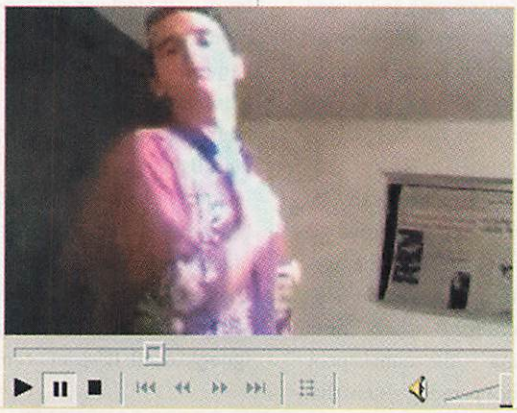
Even if you have no interest in earnings reports, job cuts, and what Bertelsmann has spent on Napster (an estimated $100 million and counting), CNET is invaluable just for keeping you up to speed on new product announcements, introductions, and delays. And the search capability makes it a snap to get through the voluminous archive. **[cnet.com]**

20 BEST COMPUTER PRODUCT REVIEWS
ZDNet

Luckily for consumers, ZDNet reviewers sure do like to play with techie toys. The site offers critiques of sleek laptops and digital cameras, naturally, along with the less glamorous stuff, too, including CD burners and software utilities. Reviews include long lists of specifications covering every port, plug, jack, and socket. **[zdnet.com]**

21 BEST GEEK HANGOUT
Slashdot

Still the Web's buzziest hive, Slashdot is a vocal, opinionated community where nerds of all nations come to debate everything from the latest microprocessors to stem-cell research to the *Star Wars* prequels. You might need a GPS receiver to navigate your way through the seemingly chaotic site. But once you get the hang of Slashdot, it is as user-friendly as that old Commodore 64 you refuse to part with. **[slashdot.org]**



DANCE WITH ME Shane Griffin takes a turn as "The Dancing Man" on SpotLife.

22 BEST HOME PAGE BUILDER
AOL Hometown

You'd expect something run by AOL to be beginner-friendly, and this free Web-building and hosting service doesn't disappoint, letting first-time designers create a page in minutes. More ambitious users appreciate the intuitive site-building tool, which lets you drag and drop text and images anywhere on a page, and even add sounds, guestbooks, and all the fancy tricks of the pros. ALSO: It's no longer free, but **Homestead** still offers a slick, feature-rich page builder for about 50 bucks per year. **[hometown.aol.com]; [homestead.com]**

23 BEST PHOTO PROCESSING SERVICE
Ofoto

The proof is in the prints. Ofoto—now a Kodak company—turns out stunning pictures from digital images you upload and does a pretty snazzy job on prints from film negatives, too. The uploading tool is a cinch to use, and basic editing features let you quickly change color saturation levels and add borders and tints. You get unlimited space in which to store pictures online, and sharing is easy. It's also an extraordinarily fast service. **[ofoto.com]**

24 BEST WEB CAM HUB
SpotLife

Granted, Web cams can be, well, spotty. For every person doing something interesting on camera, there are a dozen people simply staring into the lens, looking bored, sleepy, or scary (sometimes all three). But if you like to watch—or like to put on a show—SpotLife trumps the competition, with scores of live feeds to choose from. Yes, lots of bored, scary people, but also some budding entertainers, such as Joe Bavone and friends on "The Dancing Man." The site's software and hosting service, starting at $3 per month, make it easy to broadcast your own shtick. **[spotlife.com]**

25 BEST REMOTE CONTROL
GoToMyPC

This slick new service can't help you if you misplace your car keys, cell phone, or anniversary present (actually, nothing can help you on that last one). But if you left something on your PC, bingo—you're in luck. GoToMyPC lets you access, and remotely operate, your work or home PC from any other Windows-based computer in the world that's connected to the Internet. Fees start at $10 per month. **[gotomypc.com]**

26 BEST TECH SUPPORT
ExpertLive

Here's another handy service from the folks behind GoToMyPC (above). Visit the site and type in your problem, and support specialists bid for the work. Most bids are in the $10 to $20 range and made within two minutes. Check out each expert's feedback and pick your guru. Using a surprisingly glitch-free screen-share application, your techie takes control of your PC and fixes the problem (usually) while you watch. **[expertcity.com/expertlive]**

27 BEST FREE E-MAIL
Yahoo! Mail

We like the Yahoo! e-mail setup because we're greedy: The portal gives us a 6MB mailbox, while MSN Hotmail offers 2MB. The other features are comparable: tools that block spam, let you check other e-mail accounts, and give you message notification via an instant-messaging client. And Yahoo! hasn't been messing with its interface, either (memo to Hotmail: A new look worked for Jennifer Aniston; it didn't for you). So we can get right to composing, reading, and managing our messages, without having to relearn all the buttons' locations. **[mail.yahoo.com]**

28 BEST INSTANT MESSAGING
AOL Instant Messenger

Other companies—notably Microsoft—have tried to dethrone AOL as instant-messaging champ, but none has come close. Now with more than 100 million users, AIM has moved beyond the home and campus and into the workplace. You don't have to be an AOL member to use it, and thanks to the elegant interface, you don't have to be an engineer, either. ALSO: No law limits you to one IM client. So grab **Yahoo! Messenger**, as well, and get alerts when you get new Yahoo! mail. If you've got a Web cam, you can send your mug out over the Netwaves, too. **[aol.com/aim]; [messenger.yahoo.com]**

29 BEST CHAT
Yahoo! Chat

The global reach enjoyed by Yahoo! gives it a vast, diverse audience of participants, meaning that anytime you log on, you can talk about practically anything—from Australian politics to biotechnology to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—with practically anyone. Good design also gives Yahoo! the edge; unlike rival AOL, it doesn't limit chats to just 23 members per room, and it lets you search for member rooms by category. **[chat.yahoo.com]**

GRIFFIN: COURTESY OF SPOTLIFE; COMMUTERS: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

30 BEST SOFTWARE DOWNLOADS

CNET: Download.com

Try out this site and one thing is for certain: Next time, you'll need to buy the bigger hard disk. Among the 20,000-plus programs here—demos, shareware, commercial packages—are all manner of MP3 players, screen savers, printer drivers, antivirus utilities, and Web browsers. Sorting through such a huge collection can be taxing, and it would be if not for the editors' picks, hands-on reviews, and user ratings. **[download.com]**

31 BEST HANDHELD SOFTWARE HUB

Handango

Talk about handheld heaven! Here you can find more than 10,000 ready-to-download applications for Palm, Pocket PC, Windows CE, and even those slick RIM BlackBerry devices. Much of the software is commercial, but freebies abound as well, all organized into categories—so you can find that much-needed document reader, exercise tracker, or hard-to-find clinical neurology textbook. **ALSO:** For the Palm OS crowd, **PalmGear.com** is an invaluable source of software, news, and product announcements. **[handango.com]; [palmgear.com]**

32 BEST HANDHELD TOOL

Vindigo

Tell Vindigo where you are in any of 19 metropolitan areas and it will tell you where you can eat, drink, shop, and be merry nearby, complete with walking directions. The service is free and constantly being updated; you get the latest information whenever you synchronize via a PC connected to the Net. Rest assured: With Vindigo at your side, you don't look like a tourist—just a geek. **[vindigo.com]**

lifestyle&community

By Heidi LaFleche

The Net helped unite the world community in many new ways. It also continued to diversify, reflecting an ever-wider spectrum of groups

As the Internet gets bigger, the world gets smaller. Despite—and also because of—the attacks on the United States, the world community is uniting in ways never before possible.

Just minutes after the terrorist strikes, people logged on not only for news but also to e-mail and instant-message loved ones, especially when phone lines failed. We found solace at **Beliefnet [beliefnet.com]**, a multifaith spiritual community, and counsel through **GriefNet.org**, which added two online support groups, Horrific Loss and US-Tragedy.

In addition to reaching out for comfort, people also reached out to help. Internet and technology heavyweights—AOL Time Warner, Yahoo!, and Microsoft, among others—joined forces to launch **American Liberty Partnership [libertyunites.org]**, a portal listing ways for people to donate to the relief effort. The auction site **eBay [ebay.com]** launched its own fund-raiser, Auction for America, where buyers and sellers aimed to raise $100 million within 100 days.

Even before terror struck, many dot-com companies had gone dark when the Net boom turned to bust. But the Internet itself is thriving and attracting a greater diversity of surfers. In February '01, the Pew Internet & American Life Project reported that the number of women online now equaled the number of men. Seniors also made cyberstrides. While only 15 percent of Americans over 65 have Net access, according to a September '01 Pew study, it's a fervent group: 69 percent log on daily. Another Pew report showed that half of Hispanics age 18 and over are online, often congregating at sites geared to the international Spanish-speaking community, such as **El Sitio [elsitio.com]**.

Hobbies and pastimes—and the desire to share those interests—continued to provide a welcome diversion in 2001. **Yahoo! Groups [groups.yahoo.com]**, a collection of discussion boards, was one of the portal's most popular growth areas. "Some of these special-interest groups are narrowcast to a degree possible only on a global network," media theorist Douglas Rushkoff observed in "The People's Net," *Y-Life*'s July 2001 cover story. "People interested in anything from absinthe drinking to zither tuning can find one another across great distances."

As the Net gets bigger, its online communities grow stronger, coalesced around common ideas, ideals, and interests.

33 BEST FASHION DESTINATION

eLuxury

Big-screen glamour helped Americans get through the Great Depression. In today's tough times, you can aspire to high fashion right on your computer screen. Okay, so maybe you don't have a spare $1,895 for an antique shearling jacket from John Varvatos, but not everything here costs an arm and a leg (usually, just a leg). And there is plenty from which to choose, including a comprehensive Louis Vuitton collection, as well as selections from such big-name designers as Hugo Boss and Donna Karan. Men and women fare equally well, so window-shoppers can eye sultry models of both sexes. **[eluxury.com]**

34 BEST HOUSE AND HOME COMPANION

Martha Stewart

Martha Stewart may live in a better neighborhood than you do, but your home can look just like Martha's—minus the household staff. Here, the domestic diva serves up a heaping helping of tips, showing you how to fluff a duvet and master the napkin fold. There are creative ideas for holidays, but if you'd rather buy than make your Valentine's Day decor, visit the well-stocked store. ALSO: Next time the kids get crayon on the porcelain, check out the Stain Solver, one of the many interactive how-to guides at **BHG.com. [marthastewart.com]; [bhg.com]**

35 BEST FOOD AND DRINK HUB

Epicurious

We love the new design—and if you spend enough time here, you'll boast a new look, too: extra large. But at least you'll beef up in style, dining on such meals as curried cider-braised pork chops. There are more than 13,000 easy-to-follow recipes, complete with user reviews. Check the stellar Sommelier section for wine guides, and the next time you're thinking Australian chardonnay, you'll know who the premier producers are. ALSO: Slice, dice, julienne: The video how-to clips at the **Food Network** will walk you through kitchen skills from basic to advanced. **[epicurious.com]; [foodtv.com]**

36 BEST GENEALOGY RESOURCE

RootsWeb.com

Why pay to track down relatives who probably didn't leave you money anyway? RootsWeb offers more genealogy tools than most fee-based sites, along with access to a vast community of fellow ancestry hunters. The databases are filled with birth certificates, marriage records, and other documents uploaded by users—enormously helpful, as most records are not otherwise available online. Mailing lists and message boards let you network with others who may be looking for—or have already found—the same relatives you're seeking. **[rootsweb.com]**

37 BEST PARENTING RESOURCE

Dadmag.com

Don't let the name fool you: This site has terrific tips for moms, too, such as what to tell the little tykes when they catch you, well, working on that next little tyke. Dadmag doesn't shy away from the difficult topics, such as helping kids cope with divorce, and helping you cope at home after losing your job. ALSO: For the scoop on food allergies, kid-safe decor, absent spouses, and much more, don't buy a book—find a fellow parent. The message boards and chats on **ClubMom** will hook you up fast. **[dadmag.com]; [clubmom.com]**

38 BEST SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS COMMUNITY

Nerve.com

True confession: We're not all that crazy about Nerve's vaunted highbrow sex fiction and poetry (though it is pretty cool to read Dirty Limericks by film writer and producer Ethan Coen). What makes the site a winner is its bustling, articulate community. The (often painfully) personal essays, brutally honest advice columns, and slick matchmaking tools make Nerve a hip, happening, and often hilarious place to meet, vent, and bond. **[nerve.com]**

39 BEST SPIRITUALITY COMMUNITY

Beliefnet

In these trying times, few sites seem as relevant. Beliefnet is a multifaith community where users not only delve into their own faith but also learn about others, discovering the tenets—and the history—of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and other religions. While the content helps us understand our neighbors, the online discussions and dialogue groups invite us to question and debate, teach and learn—all in a peaceful environment that someday, perhaps, we'll be able to create offline, too. **[beliefnet.com]**

40 BEST KIDS' COMMUNITY
AOL: Kids Only

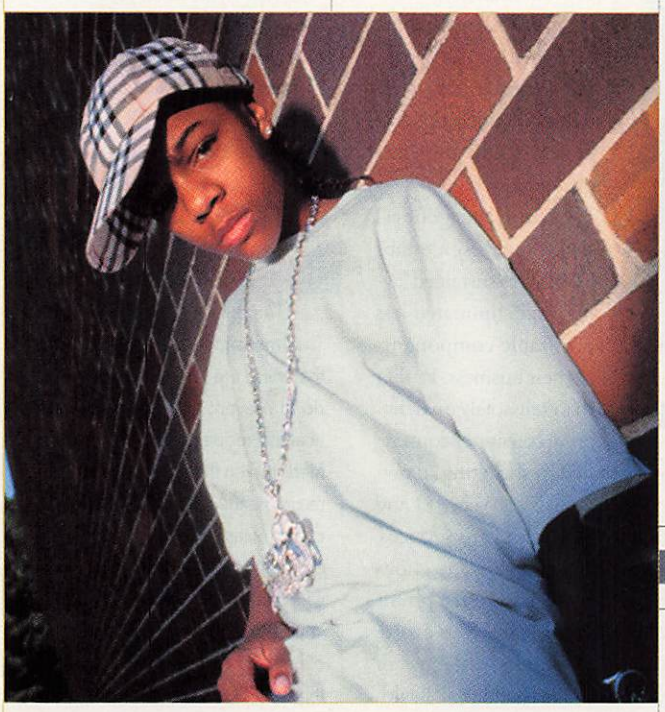
No one better understands the potential benefits—and dangers—of letting children go online than America Online. The service's robust channel for youngsters is packed with kid-friendly games, chat, and homework helpers, and is protected by parent-friendly safeguards. The kids have a ball, and you don't lose any sleep. The site is available only to AOL members, and it's one of the best reasons for signing up. **[AOL keyword: Kids Only]**

41 BEST WOMEN'S COMMUNITY
iVillage

The superb health section—covering everything from pregnancy to preventing saddle sores while bike riding—is reason alone to visit iVillage, which now boasts even richer content since it acquired Women.com. More highlights: the best female-focused message boards on the Web (new boards, including one for talking to kids, were quickly set up after the September 11 attacks), savvy relationship advice, diet and fitness tips, career resources, and tons of tales from the trenches. **[ivillage.com]**

42 BEST GAY COMMUNITY
Gay.com

Gay.com serves a variety of audiences: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, the transgender community, and people who really, really like Margaret Cho. Happily, it serves them all well. Lively chatrooms and personals offer help on the social front, while excellent feature stories tackle more practical concerns, such as tax issues that gay couples face. ALSO: The new **PridePage** covers the local gay scene in some of the world's major cities. Thumbs up, too, for informative post-attack articles such as "Can Queers Donate Blood?" **[gay.com]; [pridepage.com]**



JOHN RICARD/RETNA

LIL BOW WOW Fans of the rapper can hit BET.com for the latest.

43 BEST AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY
BET.com

Sure, you can come here solely for the great music, from silky-smooth R&B to slammin' feeds from 360hiphop.com. But if you stopped there, you'd miss out on all the other ways in which BET serves its community. News stories take a hard look at how budget cuts and terrorist attacks affect African Americans; columns provide practical advice on careers and owning a home. And if you want to meet people, BET even has its own instant-messaging service. ALSO: **NetNoir**'s burgeoning small-business directory lets entrepreneurs pitch their goods and services to other African Americans. **[bet.com]; [netnoir.com]**

44 BEST LATINO COMMUNITY
El Sitio

Looking for a Spanish-language site with the depth and breadth of the best Web portals? *No problema.* Beyond its country-specific content (for the U.S., Argentina, Brazil, and a half dozen other nations), El Sitio offers a staggering range of resources, from news to relationship advice to technology tutorials. You can build your own Web page, follow your favorite sports teams, participate in the many chat events, and when—make that *if*—you get a free minute, learn how to burn a music CD. If only there were an English version for the rest of us. **[elsitio.com]**

45 BEST ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY
Click2Asia

If what you see looks a bit familiar, that's because Click2Asia merged with last year's champ, aOnline, creating a supersite. Asian news is covered in depth, but we're also partial to the extensive directory of sites, which can steer you toward museums in Malaysia, music from China, and Thai restaurants in Los Angeles. Clubs and a bustling singles scene make Click2Asia a great way to meet others from around the world. **[click2asia.com]**

46 BEST DISABILITY COMMUNITY
WeMedia

An indispensable resource, WeMedia continues to make life for disabled people easier—both online and off. New this year is the site's Talking Browser, which "speaks" text that appears onscreen, enabling visually impaired individuals to use the Web. There is a wealth of information on assistive technologies and employment issues, and the marketplace sells all manner of medical and mobility equipment, from power scooters to shower chairs. New, too, are the auctions—for hearing aids, hands-free accessories, and more—thanks to a partnership with eBay. **[wemedia.com]**

47 BEST PLACE TO GIVE
Helping.org

Whether it's time or money you want to donate, Helping.org can show you the way. The database contains more than 700,000 nonprofit organizations, all searchable by keyword or category (including health, religion, arts, and education). Not only can you make your donation online, but you can also be sure that your charity gets 100 percent of it: The site's administrative costs are covered by the AOL Time Warner Foundation. For those who want to aid hands-on, the link to VolunteerMatch will show you which local organizations could use the help. **[helping.org]**

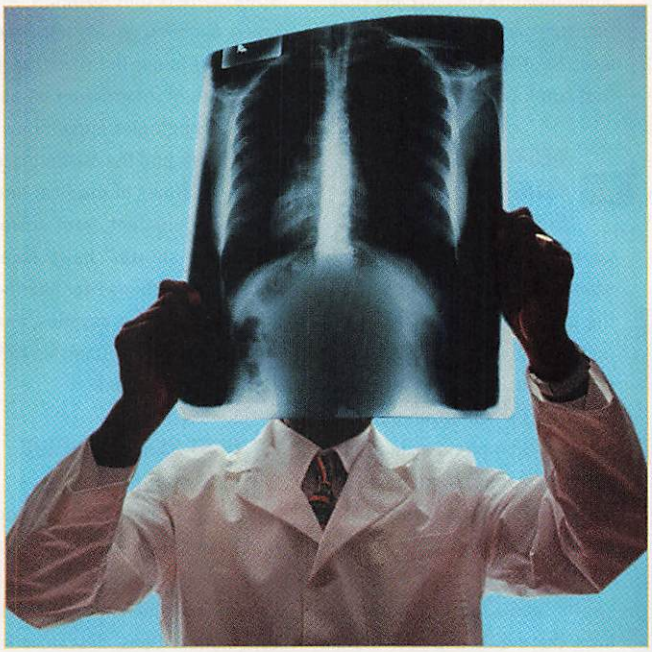
health&fitness

By Joanne Chen

As the Internet economy faltered this year, the big content sites beefed up business with health care services—which eventually proved to be a lifeline

When faced with a national emergency, the major health-oriented sites proved their worth. By noon on September 11, **WebMD [webmd.com]** posted its Special Report: National Tragedy page, where people could read—and, in some cases, talk to experts—about germ warfare, nightmares, child psychology issues, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and lots more. **Medscape Health for Consumers [medscapehealth.com]** provided similar support to consumers, while its sister site, **Medscape [medscape.com]**, helped doctors exchange emergency resource information and find out how to volunteer.

"Lots of people were very thirsty for advice dealing with the emotional repercussions of the event, and the Internet allowed that information to be delivered quickly and privately," observes Eric Brown, a research director at Forrester. The Net also made it easier for caring people far from New York City or Washington, D.C., to help. By logging on to the **American Red Cross [redcross.org]**—either directly or via links on sites ranging from Amazon to Yahoo!—anyone could make a no-hassle contribution or find a place to donate blood near home. It's difficult to gauge how well the Red Cross would have fared if Net usage weren't as ubiquitous as it is, but agency spokesman Phil Zepeda confirmed that "an unprecedented number of people gave generously." The Red Cross collected more than $40 million in online contributions in a little more than a week, Zepeda said.



Meanwhile, fake disaster relief sites, delivering bad information and asking for money, soon appeared. But news travels fast online, and savvy consumers heeded warnings about the bogus sites. Indeed, as the Internet economy sank throughout the year, the weeding out of health sites quickened its pace, making the public less likely to log on to questionable content and dubious product pitches.

Amid the general shakedown, even established sites sustained layoffs and eliminated less profitable components of their business. Rather than rely solely on delivering consumer content, which could not be sustained by shrinking ad revenues alone, heavyweights such as WebMD and Medscape beefed up their health care services, from streamlining medical insurance transactions to offering office-application systems to physicians. In the process, the sites learned to evolve while managing to stay in business. As the recent tragedy proved, when used wisely and well, health information on the Web can be a real lifeline.

48 BEST HEALTH CARE PORTAL

Medscape Health for Consumers

It won't get you through Harvard Medical School, but the consumer site by Medscape—long a trusted resource for health professionals—can bring you up to speed on just about any medical condition, symptom, or drug. The 48 topic channels go heavy on details, light on jargon. ALSO: The animated Anatom-E-Tools at **WebMD** explain spinal disorders and heart disease better than most surgeons, yet don't require a copayment. **[medscapehealth.com]; [webmd.com]**

49 BEST CANCER RESOURCE

CancerNet

This thorough site from the National Cancer Institute explores in depth the different forms of the disease, walking you through treatment options, side effects, research updates, and detection techniques. Follow the link to the NCI's Cancer-Trials page to find the latest experimental trials. **[cancernet.gov]**

50 BEST HEART DISEASE RESOURCE

Americanheart.org

The American Heart Association knows that there are lots of things you can do to prevent heart disease. From healthful recipes—yes, you can make fried chicken that won't kill you—and recommended alcohol intake to a calculator of target heart rates during exercise, the tools here can help you be your grumpy old self for years to come. You can also learn the warning signs of heart attack and stroke, as well as the ins and outs of cardiovascular procedures. **[americanheart.org]**

DOCTOR WITH X-RAY: TONY CORDOZA/GETTYONE; BRAIN MAP: PETER SAMUELS/GETTYONE

51 BEST MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE

Internet Mental Health

Mental health problems come in many shapes and sizes. Panic disorders, agoraphobia, bipolar disorder, social phobia—these are serious conditions we often don't recognize or understand. IMH compiles authoritative links that lift the veil from a long list of disorders, and points to support groups and organizations ready to help. **[mentalhealth.com]**

52 BEST ALTERNATIVE MEDICAL SITE

NCCAM: National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Can acupuncture relieve dental pain? Will vitamin E help prevent cancer? The NCCAM, a part of the National Institutes of Health, takes a hard, scientific look at a wide range of alternative healing practices, informing you which ones have promise (and where you can find a clinical trial) and which are most likely a waste of your time. Handy fact sheets fill you in on St. John's wort and other dietary supplements. **[nccam.nih.gov]**

53 BEST FITNESS & NUTRITION SITE

Asimba

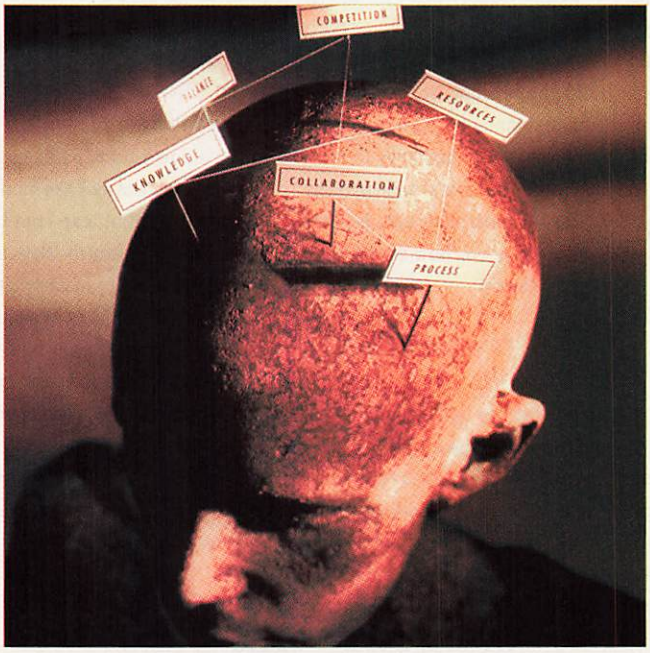
Maybe Asimba takes its training regimens just a bit too far. Sure, we could use daily workout instructions, but do we really need a program for walking? And must we work our way up to "intermediate walking"? But perhaps only a site so obsessive about exercise can help us get back into shape after too many trips to the ice-cream truck. You can keep a log of your workouts and your diet online; we're going to start ours just as soon as we finish this hot-fudge sundae. **[asimba.com]**

learning&creativity

By Matt Goldberg

Campuses found new ways to use the Net to reach out to their communities, and free speech in the digital domain became a hot-button issue

While America's TV news anchors wept and the biggest news Web sites strained to accommodate unprecedented traffic, personal pages and weblogs stepped in to fill the void following the September 11 terrorist attacks. For colleges up and down the island of Manhattan, the Internet became the primary means of communication during the emergency. New York University used e-mail to contact students who lived at the school's Wall Street–area residences. The New York Law School's Web site told students how to get past the police checkpoints once classes resumed at its campus, about nine blocks north of the World Trade Center debris. Meanwhile, colleges across the country used the Web and e-mail to reach out to alumni who might have been near ground zero.



Last year also saw several public legal battles over the open exchange of ideas, the significance of which was heightened by post-disaster debates about the price of personal liberty.

In a case that became a lightning rod for the **Electronic Frontier Foundation [eff.org]**, FBI agents in July apprehended Russian programmer Dmitry Sklyarov after he gave a presentation at a U.S. conference about how to circumvent the anti-copying features of Adobe's e-book software—an activity made illegal under the controversial Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Opponents of the DMCA argue that the law impinges on the doctrine of fair use, which allows academics and students, among others, to copy limited amounts of content for their own noncommercial uses. Adobe dropped its initial support for the case, and Sklyarov was released from jail pending trial. But the fight between First Amendment advocates and copyright holders over the DMCA is not likely to end anytime soon.

Back in the spring, the recording industry threatened to sue Princeton professor Edward Felten, who was planning to present at a security conference a paper on the failings of digital music encryption. As a preemptive strike, Felten and the EFF sued the industry, asking the court to defend Felten's scientific freedom. In September, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a motion to dismiss the suit, and the case was pending as this magazine went to press.

Whether one sides with the free-speech supporters or intellectual-property protectors, the importance and fragility of these competing and distinctly American rights were dramatically underscored by the still-vivid events of September 11.

100 BEST SITES

54 BEST LEARNING PORTAL
Britannica.com

It's hard not to love a site that gives you access to the complete, 32-volume Encyclopædia Britannica—though our love *was* stronger before the site started charging $8 a month (or $50 a year). Britannica can't be beat for researching famous (and not-so-famous) people, places, and things. Exhaustive, well-written articles include handpicked links to related sites. **[britannica.com]**

55 BEST DICTIONARY
YourDictionary.com

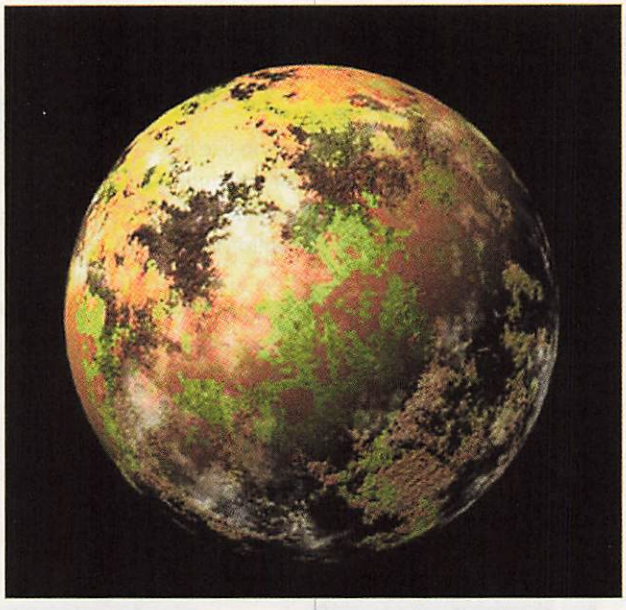
Almost any dictionary site can tell you what a word means, but this one gives you access to an entire lexicographical universe. The collection is stupendous, including dictionaries for 270 languages; glossaries of abbreviations and acronyms; rhyming dictionaries; and specialty guides for nearly 100 fields, including accounting, medicine, and—get this—leather. **[yourdictionary.com]**

56 BEST REFERENCE DIRECTORY
Refdesk.com

Every time we give this site an award, we make some lame joke about how Refdesk is the work of Bob Drudge, who also gave us Matt Drudge (he's Bob's son). This time we'll give it to you straight: This mind-boggling collection of links will take you to the Web's top dictionaries, encyclopedias, telephone directories, search engines, maps, homework helpers, weather reports, newspapers, and magazines. **[refdesk.com]**

57 BEST EDUCATIONAL KIDS' SITE
DiscoverySchool.com: BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper

When he's not out playing laser tag or paintball, 14-year-old B.J. Pinchbeck is standing by to help kids with their homework. No, he won't do the assignments, but he can point to nicely annotated links to more than 700 sites that provide tutorials, glossaries, and study aids. **[school.discovery.com/homeworkhelp/bjpinchbeck]**



58 BEST HOW-TO SITE
Learn2

Sure, you can boil an egg, carve a turkey, and tune a guitar. But do you know how to get a really close shave? Learn2's step-by-step tutorials show you how to do practically anything, from hosting a wine tasting to appreciating what's on tap at your corner bar. **[learn2.com]**

59 BEST TRANSLATOR
AltaVista: Translate with Babel Fish

We give a big thumbs-up—or however you say that in Chinese, French, German, and a half dozen other languages—to this fast, no-nonsense translator. Enter up to 150 words in one language, or even a URL if you want a full Web page translated. **[babel.altavista.com]**

60 BEST LITERARY RESOURCE
Bartleby.com

Never judge a book by its cover. Bartleby might not look like much—just a whole lot of text—but this online library is one of the Net's true gems. Read literary masterpieces by Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Twain, and many others, as well as the Emancipation Proclamation and other landmarks of nonfiction. You'll find scientific papers, philosophical treatises, historical memoirs, and reference tomes. Everything is free, and late fees have been waived. **[bartleby.com]**

61 BEST SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY RESOURCE
Marshall Brain's HowStuffWorks

If you want to keep the gang spellbound with fascinating stories of how nuclear radiation, kidneys, and Web servers work, the hundreds of illustrated, easy-to-follow tutorials here are exactly what you need. Just want to satisfy your curiosity about how boomerangs do their thing? That's covered, too. **[howstuffworks.com]**

62 BEST ORIGINAL WEB ART
School of Visual Arts

The students in SVA's computer art department pay big bucks to learn how to dazzle us with high-tech artistry. If the works displayed on their Web sites (which this site links to) are any indication, they're getting their money's worth. Just take a look. **[www.sva.edu/mfacad]**

63 BEST ART MUSEUM
Guggenheim.com

Even before its official launch, we were gaga over Guggenheim.com. Interactive exhibitions are filled with eye-popping images (you can catch "The Art of the Motorcycle" here if you couldn't make it to the Guggenheim in New York City, Spain, or Las Vegas). The site plans to add an archive of images, commentary, and artist profiles. **[guggenheim.com]**

64 BEST LIVING ATLAS
NationalGeographic.com

This is the Web's premier spot for exploring the world virtually. Take an interactive tour of the Congo River Basin or the mountains of Nepal. Or try the MapMachine: Choose what you want to see—forests, earthquake faults, elevation, precipitation, vegetation, or roads and railways—and a beautiful, full-color map is presented on the fly. **[nationalgeographic.com]**

65 BEST CLASSROOM RESOURCE
PBS

Typical kids don't usually tune into *Nova* or *Masterpiece Theatre* on their own, so why not encourage them by building a lesson plan around a show and flunking them if they don't watch? This site is loaded with ideas on how to incorporate a program—for example, the *Nova* episode "Lost at Sea: The Search for Longitude"—into a creative discussion. **[pbs.org]**

EARTH: BRUCE WANDS; AIRPORT: LUC BEZIAT/GETTYONE

travel&recreation

By Susan Breslow Sardone

Though grounded abruptly, high-flying travel sites responded quickly. Now e-tourism is showing signs of recovery

Before terrorists turned four U.S. passenger planes into deadly weapons, online travel was one e-commerce category that defied the dot-com decline. Not only had **Expedia.com, Travelocity.com**, and **Priceline.com** achieved profitability, but newcomer **Orbitz [orbitz.com]**—the fastest-growing Web site on record—had increased competition among them.

Immediately following the hijackings, demand and desire for travel fell precipitously. Airlines already staggering from the recession began reducing flights and staff. Online bookings plummeted: Expedia reported a decrease in reservations of about 45 percent by the week's end. Biztravel.com ceased operations altogether 10 days after the assaults. To bolster the airline industry, President Bush signed into law a $15 billion emergency aid package.

Every major online travel agency quickly responded to the disaster through customer-service initiatives. Expedia's Travel Disruptions: Resource Center and Orbitz's Travel Watch distinguished themselves as especially comprehensive. Succinct bulletins from **Smarter Living [smarterliving.com]** illuminated the tragedy's immediate effects and presented travelers with useful insights.

While the full effect of the attacks has yet to be determined, the $455 billion worldwide travel-and-tourism business is showing resiliency. A week after the September 11 violence, in a nationwide survey by the Simmons Market Research Bureau, 57 percent of frequent leisure travelers said the attacks would have little or no effect on their plans. Expedia, the only online travel agent to report numbers, noted a modest increase in bookings. By mid-October, Travelocity reported that air ticket sales had bounced back to 80 to 90 percent of pre–September 11 levels. And while the attacks slowed industry growth, e-bookings continued to expand; PhoCusWright analysts predict that online sales will make up 15 percent of the travel business in 2002.

Ground-transportation providers witnessed a dramatic spike in Web site visits. **Amtrak [amtrak.com]** registered a 100 percent increase September 13, and into October, traffic continued at about 25 percent above the predisaster level.

Given that Americans have always loved to travel, an airline industry rebound is more than likely. "It will take time," says Suzi LeVine, Expedia's director of product marketing. "What needs to happen is that we find a balance as a traveling country, between convenience and security."

66 BEST OVERALL TRAVEL SITE

Expedia.com

This travel megahub has long run neck and neck with rival Travelocity, which won our Gold Star back in June for its innovative trip-planning tools. But in the wake of the terrorist attacks, Expedia nosed ahead by doing the best job of keeping us abreast of security procedures, listing airport closings and restrictions (even seemingly minor ones, such as the off-limits lockers at Denver International), and telling us which tourist attractions were closed. ALSO: With the Net's biggest database of Web-only discount airfares, newcomer **Orbitz** flies high. **[expedia.com]; [orbitz.com]**

67 BEST TRAVEL DEALS

Priceline.com

It's the site travelers either love or hate. If you're flexible—you can live with a 7 A.M. departure that makes a stop, for instance, and you don't care who provides your rental car or hotel room—Priceline can come through with great rates. That's particularly true for last-minute travel, when airlines typically charge top dollar. Do your research before you hit Priceline, name a low but still-reasonable price, and odds are you'll be traveling on the cheap. **[priceline.com]**

68 BEST ADVENTURE TRAVEL SITE

iExplore

iExplore has a pretty liberal definition of adventure. If you're not ready for scuba diving, white-water rafting, or a safari expedition, you can check out the itinerary for a relaxing food-and-wine excursion in Tuscany (hey, it's outdoors, at least). Whatever your pleasure, iExplore provides experts

who can field your questions, and it can hook you up with vacation packages. **[iexplore.com]**

69 BEST CITY GUIDES
Citysearch

Say you're looking for the best pizza in Columbus, Ohio. We've got two helpful hints. First, don't. Second, if you insist, at least check Citysearch. Its guides to more than 40 U.S. cities can tell you where to see it, do it, play it, eat it, and buy it. ALSO: Keeping up with the hottest clubs in town is a full-time job—and it's been filled, by **Timeout.com. [citysearch.com]; [timeout.com]**

70 BEST TRAVEL COMMUNITY
IgoUgo

The user journals on IgoUgo tell of adventures large and small, in places from Antarctica to Zimbabwe. The restaurant and hotel reviews are written by folks who have been there—and sometimes wish they hadn't been. A stop here can save you grief and add sight-seeing pleasures to your next excursion. If you post a journal when you get back from your trip, you can earn points redeemable for travel gear and frequent-flier miles. **[igougo.com]**

71 BEST GOLF GUIDES
GolfOnline: Courses/Travel

Lugging your clubs through the airport is the easy part. Harder is knowing which plane to board for a great golf vacation. Luckily, the editors of *Golf Magazine* have played all the top courses and stayed at all the big-time resorts (it's a tough life). But the magazine pros aren't the only ones weighing in. GolfOnline's excellent course finder draws from a database of greens worldwide and includes user comments. **[golfonline.com/travel]**

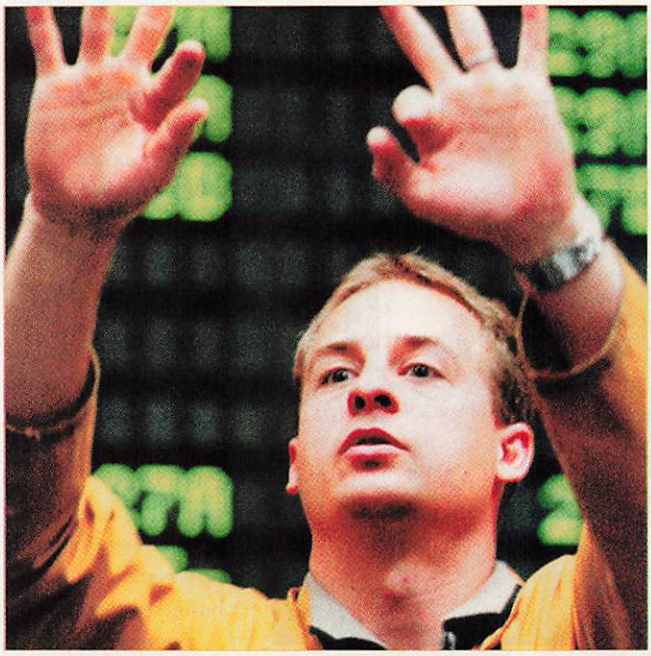
money&shopping

By Dean Foust

The direct hit on Wall Street accelerated the decline of e-brokers. But new Net-based bond-trading systems performed well

Twelve months ago, we were still a day-trading nation, buying and selling stocks with staccato clicks via online brokers. Talk about reversal of fortune! The sobering events of the past year—including the dot-com collapse and the first recession in a decade—have changed how we look at life and money alike.

In the stock market, competition among cyberbrokers—which had become so heated that it briefly pushed commissions as low as...well, zero—is over, with some firms closing their doors and others selling out. And with trading volume drying up, the survivors have been none too shy about wringing more revenue from their customers. **CharlesSchwab [charlesschwab.com]**, for instance, has upped its maintenance fees for accounts of less than $5,000 (to $45 from $25) and raised its minimum no-fee balance (to $50,000 from $20,000). Ouch. Trades are getting more expensive as well: **TD Waterhouse [tdwaterhouse.com]** upped its commissions from $12 to $15 for all customers except those who trade at least 72 times a year or have an account of $500,000 or more. E-brokers are also pulling back on cutting-edge services. Indeed, Aether Systems, once a major provider of wireless technology to financial institutions, is now focused on selling its services to police departments, truck dispatchers, and package-delivery firms.



JONATHAN KIRN/GETTYONE

At the same time, the World Trade Center attacks are likely to prod Wall Street into a fully digital future. For some firms, the challenge of rebuilding included reassembling the portfolios of countless customers whose stock certificates, order confirmations, and account records were found miles away from the explosion—if at all. Although all the investments were safe, since they were insured, the tragedy is likely to accelerate ongoing efforts to purge physical certificates from the securities-trading process.

While Wall Street faced the daunting challenge of reopening the markets, many traders were pleasantly surprised at how well **TradeWeb [tradeweb.com]** and other nascent Internet-based bond-trading systems handled the crush of incoming orders. "There was a lot of reliance among Wall Street pros on electronic trading systems," noted Andrew Nybo, a senior analyst with TowerGroup. As a result, in coming years it may suddenly be as cheap and easy for online investors to buy bonds as it was to buy stocks during the 1990s.

72 BEST PERSONAL FINANCE SITE
SmartMoney.com

Planning for your retirement or the kids' education may well drain your checking account, but it shouldn't deplete your patience. SmartMoney offers savvy advice and some of the best tools on the Web, including a work sheet to determine which type of IRA suits your needs. If you're an investing newbie who thinks "large caps" are for bigheaded Yankees fans, fear not: The outstanding SmartMoney University can walk you through the basics. ALSO: Boasting the best online portfolio manager, **MSN: Money** automatically alerts you to splits and dividends. **[smartmoney.com]; [moneycentral.com]**

73 BEST TAX ADVICE
TaxPlanet.com

Give Gary Klott points just for writing an article titled "Charitable Tax Aspects of the Jewish High Holidays," let alone making it accessible and informative. Beyond copious links to tax forms and IRS publications, the site offers stellar tips on making Uncle Sam's bite smaller. After September 11, TaxPlanet also provided excellent post-attack updates, noting which deadlines had been extended and how taxpayers who suffered property losses could get quick refunds by filing amended returns for 2000. **[taxplanet.com]**

74 BEST ONLINE BROKER
CharlesSchwab

It takes bucks to make bucks. At 30 bucks per trade, Schwab is by no means the cheapest online broker. But it is the most robust, with top-notch research and features that cater to veteran investors (advanced options trading) as well as beginners (a first-rate learning center). Offline, visit any of the 400-plus Schwab branches for some face time with an expert. **[charlesschwab.com]**

75 BEST ONLINE BANK
Citi

Citigroup's site is so feature-rich and well-designed, you'll almost enjoy balancing your checkbook. The site lets you pay bills online for free, see what the day's transactions have been, get wireless alerts when a check you wrote is presented for payment, and use the C2it service to e-mail money to your relatives. **[citi.com]**

76 BEST FINANCIAL PLANNER
Financial Engines

Input your investment information and Bill Sharpe's slick site will tell you how your portfolio is likely to perform over the long run. For a $300 annual fee, Financial Engines will tell you how you can do even better, suggesting mutual funds to buy and sell. Why put your money where Sharpe's mouth is? He's won a Nobel Prize in economics, and you probably haven't. Access to the jargon-free tutorials and fund scorecards is free. **[financialengines.com]**

77 BEST JOB-HUNTING SITE
Monster.com

One way to remain the Web's best job site is to buy the Web's second-best job site—which Monster did through its (still pending at press time) acquisition of HotJobs. Another way is to keep adding all sorts of terrific new features, including an online career fair for people with disabilities; a superb relocation center that provides instant mover quotes and, if you'd rather haul it yourself, helps you find truck rentals; and enough résumé and interviewing tips to help you land a job in even the most troubled of economic times. **[monster.com]**

78 BEST LOAN SOURCE
GetSmart

We can't think of an easier way to borrow money that doesn't involve a risk of broken bones for late payment. Answer a few simple questions and GetSmart scours its database of more than 100 lenders to match you with the best loans. You don't need to be in the market for a mortgage refinancing, either: GetSmart is a great place to compare credit cards. When you find the one that best fits the bill, you can apply online. **[getsmart.com]**

79 BEST CAR-BUYING HUB
CarsDirect.com

Other car-buying sites let you research and configure cars only to pass you off to dealers who call and e-mail—and call and e-mail—trying to get you into the showroom. CarsDirect wants you to stay right where you are. From its site, you can home in on a make and model, price it, configure it, finance it, and order your new wheels then and there. Sure, that's a mighty big purchase to make on the Web—but it's a big purchase at the showroom, too. And the prices here are often better. **[carsdirect.com]**

80 BEST INSURANCE BROKER
InsWeb

Some people climb Mount Everest, some run marathons, and some try to figure out insurance. InsWeb doesn't make all the fine print go away, but it can remove a good

Help Wanted

chunk of the confusion with its excellent tutorials. Compare quotes on auto, life, health, homeowner, and other types of insurance from Allstate, Prudential, Travelers, and other major players. **[insweb.com]**

81 BEST HOME-BUYING HUB
MSN: HomeAdvisor

Microsoft's home-buying site has been remodeled more often than Michael Jackson's mansion (or, for that matter, Michael Jackson). But the tinkering has paid off: HomeAdvisor's slick interface makes it a snap to wade through the vast listings and even plot nearby homes on a neighborhood map. The site's tools and tutorials are unrivaled. Get the estimated value of a house, learn about recent sales in the area, and see whether you're better off with a fixed-rate or adjustable-rate mortgage. **[homeadvisor.com]**

82 BEST ONLINE STORE
Amazon.com

We've already rewarded this store with a hefty chunk of our income—and we'd give it even more money if we were better paid. Need more justification? Start with superior service, excellent product selection (including spanking-new computer and travel departments), and frequent promotions, such as free shipping and dollars-off coupons. Then add the voluminous—and invaluable—consumer product reviews. ALSO: **Wal-Mart** can't match Amazon's selection, but it often beats its prices—and pays for return shipping to boot. **[amazon.com]; [walmart.com]**

83 BEST SHOPPING HUB
Yahoo! Shopping

It comes closer than any other site to replicating that big suburban mall you grew up with (minus the Friendly's). Browse Barnesandnoble.com and other big-name merchants side by side with thousands of mom-and-pop shops. Type in what you're looking for—a CD, DVD, video game, or practically anything else—and find out which merchants are offering it and for how much. You can store all your shipping and billing information, go through checkout in most stores without ever leaving Yahoo!, and track all your orders from a single page. **[shopping.yahoo.com]**

84 BEST AUCTIONS
eBay

If you think our perennial winner eBay has been resting on its laurels, your thinking is just going, going, gone! New sections for cars, fine art, and real estate target upmarket bidders and sellers while the new eBay Stores section caters to those who don't have the time, or patience, for bidding: Just click and buy the darn thing outright. Sure, eBay is still your go-to source for that *Mork & Mindy* alarm clock your mom never bought you, but in these serious times, eBay has gotten serious, too: Its Auction for America campaign raised millions of dollars for victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks. **[ebay.com]**

85 BEST VIRTUAL MONEY
PayPal

Some credit for eBay's success belongs to PayPal. The popular service eliminates the need to mail checks or stand in line for money orders, making it easier for individual buyers and sellers to do business. Just enter a dollar amount and the e-mail address of your payee; the site whisks the money from your bank or credit card account to the proper party. There are no fees for sending money, and while high-volume users are charged for receiving funds, PayPal's rates often beat its rivals'. **[paypal.com]**

86 BEST PRICE FINDER
PriceGrabber.com

No, we don't want to spend a cent more than we have to on that new Game Boy. But we also don't want to deal with a fly-by-night retailer whose cut-rate prices really are too good to be true. PriceGrabber scours the Web for deals, and its user-contributed reviews can clue you in to which merchants are reliable. **[pricegrabber.com]**

87 BEST BARGAIN HUNTER
Techbargains.com

Okay, so maybe sniffing around the Web for shopping promotions is a bit déclassé for your taste. But admit it: If someone told you how you could save $10 on your next Amazon purchase, you'd bite, right? We thought so. Techbargains gives you the scoop on great sales, free shipping offers, and those neat dollars-off coupon codes. It also tracks rebates and price breaks to direct you to additional savings. Don't let the name fool you, either: Book buyers and music lovers can reap big dividends here, as well. **[techbargains.com]**

88 BEST CONSUMER PRODUCT REVIEWS
Epinions.com

No one ever said shopping was easy. But thanks to Epinions, at least it doesn't have to be risky. Here you can find abundant and detailed user reviews on just about anything you can point, shoot, ride, watch, or (yes) eat. Interested in an Apple Titanium PowerBook G4? Read the 40 member reviews exploring all the pros and cons. By the time you're done, there'll be an even better model out there. ALSO: **ConsumerReview.com** attracts knowledgeable enthusiasts who don't sugarcoat their product evaluations. Reviews cover mountain bikes, snowboards, cameras, and dozens of other categories. **[www.epinions.com]; [consumerreview.com]**

MORK & MINDY: FOTO FANTASIES; MONITOR: NIKOLAEVICH/PHOTONICA

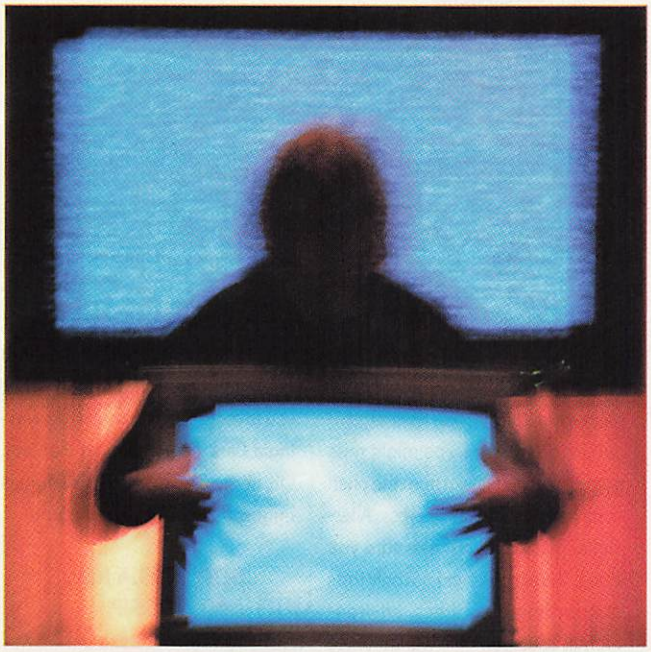
news&media

By Steve Knopper

The biggest story in decades drove millions to the Net in search of news. Sites small and large rose to meet the challenge

Online media spent most of the year in a funk. Banner ads didn't work; **Suck [suck.com]** folded in June after years of sarcastic commentary; newspapers slashed their Web staffs to the bone. Info junkies were abandoning quirky terrain for monoliths such as **MSNBC [msnbc.com]**, *The New York Times* reported in August.

Then came September 11. While the big news sites struggled to handle the surge in traffic, grassroots weblogs such as **Kottke.org** filled the gap with hair-raising eyewitness accounts and photos.



Within a month, according to an ABC News survey, 36 percent of Americans were accessing Net news sites more often than ever before; traffic from office workers to **CNN.com** alone more than doubled. Newsgroups exploded with the usual conspiracy theories, but at the same time, the Web was quick to counter dangerous gossip with reliable information. When the anthrax attacks began, a crucial "Do not panic" FAQ appeared at **CDC: Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Response [www.bt.cdc.gov]**, and the Department of Defense launched the online **Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program [www.anthrax.osd.mil]**.

To meet growing demand, major players such as **Washingtonpost.com** beefed up their servers, enabling them to deliver news more thoroughly than television and more quickly than newspapers. The spectrum of available information also broadened. Whereas during World War II Americans relied almost exclusively on radio reports for breaking headlines, today they can find British intelligence news via the community weblog **MetaFilter [metafilter.com]**, rah-rah exclusives at the **Drudge Report [drudgereport.com]**, and first-person accounts of abuse by the Taliban at **Salon.com**.

Creative minds on the Web were also responsible for one of the more surreal moments in recent history: Doctored photos downloaded from the Net—of Osama bin Laden with *Sesame Street*'s Bert—appeared in anti-U.S. posters around the world. Even the rumor-busting **Snopes.com: Urban Legends Reference Pages [snopes.com]** concluded this one was real, leaving the jester behind the now-defunct site Bert Is Evil to issue a statement. "This has gotten too close to reality," Dino Ignacio wrote on October 11, when he removed his archive of the Muppet's faux misdeeds. "I choose to be responsible enough to stop it right here"—a good sign that, even at its Pretty Strange extremes, the Net is growing up.

89 BEST NEWS SITE
BBCi

Why hop across the pond for news? BBCi has always been a superb source for coverage of international events, and it currently provides more objective information about America's war on terrorism than many homegrown sites. Links to past archives and outside sources make it easy to research the background on topics ranging from the human genome to the future of the *Concorde*. And the site's slick interactive features rival those of its U.S. competitors. ALSO: **CNN.com** eats breaking news for breakfast, while **MSNBC** scores big with in-depth reports that go heavy on the multimedia. **[bbc.co.uk]; [cnn.com]; [msnbc.com]**

90 BEST NEWSPAPER ONLINE
Washingtonpost.com

Its reporters figured out Watergate, so it's no big surprise that the *Post* has mastered online news. Washingtonpost.com is a textbook example of how to run a newsroom on the Web. The site is frequently updated, has many Net extras, and boasts an array of chats with movers and shakers. A searchable archive goes back to 1977 (other major papers are still stuck in the '90s). ALSO: It's hard to beat **The New York Times on the Web** for good old-fashioned reporting. **[washingtonpost.com]; [nytimes.com]**

91 BEST BUSINESS NEWS
WSJ.com: The Wall Street Journal

Just blocks from ground zero on September 11, WSJ.com was forced to evacuate its debris-strewn newsroom—and immediately got back to business as usual, publishing the

best financial journalism around. This is why we gladly pay the $59 per year ($29 for print subscribers). We also like WSJ.com's expanded technology coverage and free audio version of the news. **[wsj.com]**

92 BEST INTERACTIVE GRAPHICS
USA Today

You have to look hard to find a site that does graphics as well as *USA Today*. Annotated animations and illustrations explain intricate subjects such as bioterrorism pathogens with stunning visuals and clear, concise text descriptions. For once it's okay to just look at the pictures. **[usatoday.com]**

93 BEST ONLINE MAGAZINE
Slate

Part of what makes *Slate* great is the collaborative features—Diary, for instance—where contributors interact. Then there's the bracing breadth of content. While never failing to inform us—or opine—about the day's top stories, the site doesn't skimp on the offbeat stuff, including how to bet wisely on the final round of *Jeopardy!* ALSO: Yup, you've now got to pay to access most of the news and political coverage on **Salon.com** (other sections are still free), but this site remains a favorite for its often provocative articles. **[slate.com]; [salon.com]**

94 BEST NET NEWS MONITOR
OJR: Online Journalism Review

As a medium for delivering the news, the Web is still in its infancy. So who is doing it well? The OJR does a nice job of answering that question. The site looks at how journalistic ethics and methods are applied online—and how news outlets are leveraging (or ignoring) the Net's interactive capabilities. **[ojr.org]**

95 BEST EXPOSÉS
The Smoking Gun

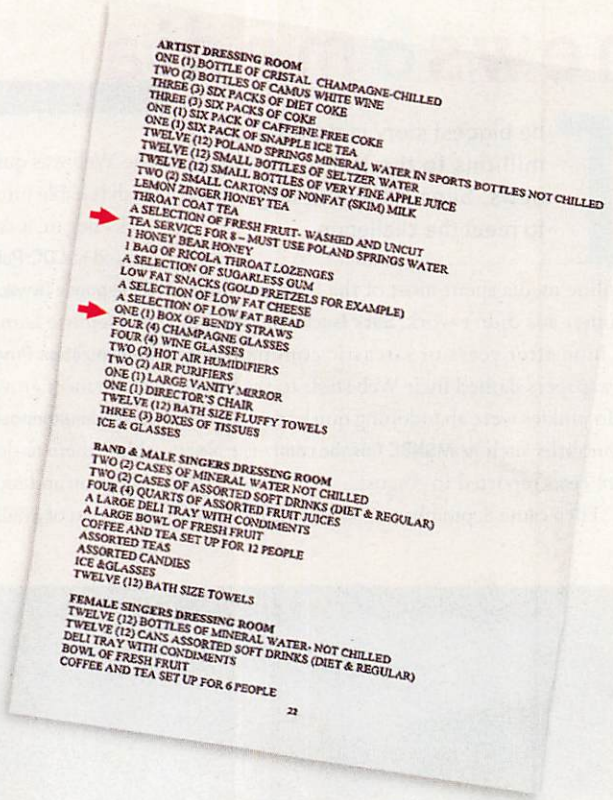
We can't resist checking out the embarrassing public documents TSG manages to dig up. Artist contracts spell out all the wacky backstage requirements of pampered stars (Mariah Carey prefers "bendy straws"); wedding registry lists let us know that even the biggest celebrities need the same crap we do. And who could ever tire of following the courtroom exploits of a favorite *Survivor* contestant? **[thesmokinggun.com]**

96 BEST WEB LOG
Kottke.org

Before September 11, few of us had even heard of this personal blog, where Jason Kottke links to sites that strike his fancy and rambles on about technology, movies, and his adventures watching *Emeril Live*. But afterward, Kottke.org became required surfing for its links to compelling first-person accounts from ground zero and harrowing video and images. **[kottke.org]**

97 BEST HUMOR MAGAZINE
The Onion

The best comedians take chances. Last fall, *The Onion* dared to glean the first strands of dark humor from tragedy. Risky stuff? You bet. But the site pulled it off. Headlines such as "God Angrily Clarifies 'Don't Kill' Rule" showed that even in the worst moments, satire can be biting, respectful, and sorely needed. ALSO: **Modern Humorist**, a contributor to *Y-Life*, is often nose-to-nose with *The Onion* with such fare as a Zagat survey of the Afghan food drops. **[theonion.com]; [modernhumorist.com]**


ARTIST DRESSING ROOM
ONE (1) BOTTLE OF CRISTAL CHAMPAGNE-CHILLED
TWO (2) BOTTLES OF CAMUS WHITE WINE
THREE (3) SIX PACKS OF DIET COKE
THREE (3) SIX PACKS OF COKE
ONE (1) SIX PACK OF CAFFEINE FREE COKE
TWELVE (12) POLAND SPRINGS MINERAL WATER IN SPORTS BOTTLES NOT CHILLED
TWELVE (12) SMALL BOTTLES OF SNAPPLE ICE TEA
TWELVE (12) SMALL BOTTLES OF SELTZER WATER
TWO (2) SMALL CARTONS OF VERY FINE APPLE JUICE
LEMON ZINGER HONEY TEA
THROAT COAT TEA
A SELECTION OF FRESH FRUIT- WASHED AND UNCUT
TEA SERVICE FOR 8 – MUST USE POLAND SPRINGS WATER
1 HONEY BEAR HONEY
1 BAG OF RICOLA THROAT LOZENGES
A SELECTION OF SUGARLESS GUM
LOW FAT SNACKS (GOLD PRETZELS FOR EXAMPLE)
A SELECTION OF LOW FAT BREAD
A SELECTION OF LOW FAT CHEESE
ONE (1) BOX OF BENDY STRAWS
FOUR (4) CHAMPAGNE GLASSES
FOUR (4) WINE GLASSES
TWO (2) HOT AIR HUMIDIFIERS
TWO (2) AIR PURIFIERS
ONE (1) LARGE VANITY MIRROR
ONE (1) DIRECTOR'S CHAIR
TWELVE (12) BATH SIZE FLUFFY TOWELS
THREE (3) BOXES OF TISSUES
ICE & GLASSES

BAND & MALE SINGERS DRESSING ROOM
TWO (2) CASES OF MINERAL WATER NOT CHILLED
TWO (2) CASES OF ASSORTED SOFT DRINKS (DIET & REGULAR)
FOUR (4) QUARTS OF ASSORTED FRUIT JUICES
A LARGE DELI TRAY WITH CONDIMENTS
A LARGE BOWL OF FRESH FRUIT
COFFEE AND TEA SET UP FOR 12 PEOPLE
ASSORTED TEAS
ASSORTED CANDIES
ICE &GLASSES
TWELVE (12) BATH SIZE TOWELS

FEMALE SINGERS DRESSING ROOM
TWELVE (12) BOTTLES OF MINERAL WATER- NOT CHILLED
TWELVE (12) CANS ASSORTED SOFT DRINKS (DIET & REGULAR)
DELI TRAY WITH CONDIMENTS
BOWL OF FRESH FRUIT
COFFEE AND TEA SET UP FOR 6 PEOPLE

22

GLITTERATI Mariah Carey's backstage wish list, courtesy of the Smoking Gun.

98 BEST ALTERNATIVE PRESS SITE
AlterNet.org

With all the big-bucks news organizations on the Web, you might miss some great journalism from the often controversial alternative press. AlterNet's mission is to make sure you don't. The site links you not only to its own writing on politics, environmental issues, and the war on drugs (among other topics) but also to some of the best work from its counterparts around the world. **[alternet.org]**

99 BEST CULTURAL DIGEST
Arts & Letters Daily

If you thought this site was just for pompous eggheads, well, we can see your point. There is, after all, the Latin slogan on the home page (*veritas odit moras*) and the articles on philosophy and classical music. But not so fast. Here you'll also discover the best museum pickup spots in Italy and learn that, according to one study, you're more likely to score while viewing a Caravaggio painting than not. Oh, heck, maybe this *is* for pompous eggheads after all. **[aldaily.com]**

100 BEST MEDIA NEWS AND GOSSIP
Jim Romenesko's MediaNews

Each day, in what amounts to a national bulletin board for journalists, Jim Romenesko posts the news about the news, from heady debates on ethical issues to catty dish from Condé Nast. But the site is a terrific resource for *anyone* interested in the media industry. Get savvy commentary from around the Web on how well we're doing our job and what we could be doing better. **[medianews.org]**

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Yahoo! Internet Life's listing of new products, promotions & Web happenings!

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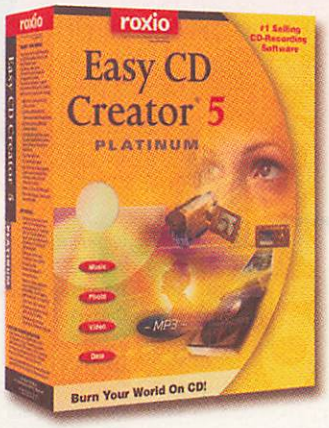

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Windows 2000 Server . . . . . from $759
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True fact: *Weird* spelled backward is *driew*

BY SCOTT ALEXANDER

THE PAGE THAT TURNS YOU INTO ELVIS!

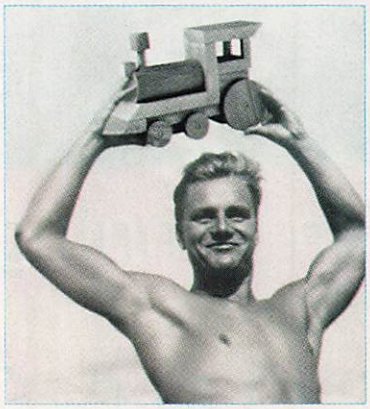
COME ON, ADMIT IT: YOU'VE ALWAYS SECRETLY suspected yourself of being a hunka hunka burnin' love. Maybe you're already 65 percent Elvis and just need a little push over the edge. Maybe you're more of a Perry Como or Johnny Rotten but have seen the error of your ways. Or maybe, just maybe, you *are* Elvis and are just trying to fake everyone out. Come one, come all—there are no judgments here. **[sudftw.com/presto.htm]**

MONOBROW

ARE YOU HAIRIER THAN MOST IN THE FOREhead department? Does a single eyebrow rule your forehead like a mad despot, drunk on the spoils of facial conquest and bent on terrorizing your dating life? While society may make you feel like an outcast, Monobrow wants you to know you're not alone. According to its philosophy, there's never been a better time to "celebrate the unity of your eyebrows" and get in touch with other "mono-bros." As Monobrow literature puts it, "Isn't it time we met? Your eyebrows already have." **[monobrow.com]**

MODEL RAILROAD NUDISTS

SO YOU LIKE TOY TRAINS. AND YOU LIKE taking your clothes off. How can you stop frightening the other guys at the model rail club? Don't worry, the Model Railroad Nudists will encourage things that will make your family even more embarrassed to have you as a member. Welcome home. (Register with Yahoo! to view this site.) **[clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/modelrailroadnudists]**



THE HAPPIEST POTTIES ON EARTH

IN THESE TIMES OF ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY, IT'S NICE TO KNOW THERE'S A PLACE YOU can go where everything's going to come out all right. The Happiest Potties on Earth are found—where else?—in the Happiest Place on Earth, Disneyland. And one noble individual has taken it upon himself to map and review all the toilets at Disneyland, so that you can take care of your biological necessities between the Enchanted Tiki Room and Space Mountain without squandering precious recreation time. **[mouseplanet.com/potties]**

IF I WERE A CELEBRITY YOU WOULD CARE

GARY BAUM REALLY LIKES CHEERIOS. AND IF HE WERE A CELEBRITY, YOU'D care. You'd also care that his greatest fear is running out of Cheerios. Also, this just in: What he dislikes most about his appearance is the Cheerios dust on the front of his shirt. His motto? "Eat Cheerios morning, noon, and night. Don't worry about the consequences. Live for today. Tomorrow you may run out." Did we mention that you'd care about all this if he were a celebrity? **[apeculture.com/garylist.htm]**

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